

# Mammy's White Folks

Emma Speed Sampson

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# Mammy's White Folks

By  
Emma Speed Sampson

*Author of  
"Billy and the Major"*



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*Mammy's White Folks*

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**Mammy's  
White Folks**



# Mammy's White Folks

## Chapter 1

### THE INTERRUPTING BABY

"Doc Andy, is you a rang yo' bell?"

"No, Mammy, I didn't ring."

"Well, I done hearn a bell a-janglin', an' fo' Gawd I can't tell whicht one it is. Mus' a been the win' an' rain. I never seed a house wif so many bells, all a-soundin' alike. Fust I think it is the phome, an' whin I takes down the lil deceiver, all I kin make out is some gal a-sayin': 'What number?' An' whin I says: 'Sebenty-seben, Gyardin Street!' she jaw back wif 'In-fermation!' I reckon she take me fer some fool what don' know whar I libs."

Dr. Wallace laughed as he dealt the cards, and his two companions joined in. The old woman looked curiously over the shoulder of her master as the game went on.

Mammy was worried. As she watched the play of the three men, disapproval was writ

in every feature of her worn old face. She hated to see Doc Andy frittering away his time in this fashion. She knew that patients would not seek him out if he continued to travel the down-hill path on which he had started. Card-playing and drinking, as Mammy was well aware, were not considered desirable recommendations for a young physician.

Nor did Doc Andy's guests meet with much favor in the old woman's eyes. True, she did like solemn Peter Roche, but Peter was an old college chum of Dr. Wallace. He was not "one of them thar fly-by-nights," as Mammy put it, "what never done a lick er wuck in they lives."

"Mr. Peter," she would say, "is a gem'man. He talks quiet an' dresses quiet an' looks lak he's willin' ter leave a drap in the bottle — mo'n that there Stanley wif his loud talk an' red neckercher an' his greedy th'oat."

Stanley was Mammy's pet aversion. She did not like his roving black eyes and his small white hands.

"Ain't got no use fer lil-handed men folks," she would say. "If'n they'd ever done anythin' wuth doin', I 'low they would a-biggered up."

Andrew Wallace had shown great promise in

his youth in spite of an extreme shyness that had always held him back at the crucial moment. His greatest handicap was his fear of women. He was afraid of all women — that is, all but Mammy. He declared that he would rather starve than be a woman's doctor. Had he not possessed a comfortable patrimony, undoubtedly he would have starved. It made little difference to the inhabitants of the southern city to which he had come that he had graduated with the highest honors from one of the best medical colleges in the country. His experience in New York hospitals meant nothing to them. All they knew was that a bashful young man had come to live in the old Grant house, with a capable-looking old colored woman to keep house for him. The doctor's new sign, recently hung out, was a small and modest one. But it was really not hung *out* at all, for it was suspended so far behind the vines and lilac bushes that it could be found only after diligent search.

On that windy, rainy night in late March, when the lilac leaves were beginning to make a decided showing and the violets that bordered the brick walk leading from the street to the deep hospitable porch were making the air sweet with their fragrance, the doctor and his old servant had been established in the Grant

house about four months. Up to that time, of pay patients he had none, but he had a growing charity practice. Charity patients could not object if their physician sat up more than half the night playing poker with doubtful companions, nor would they withdraw their patronage if professional calls were made more or less haphazardly.

Mammy was the only person who objected to the doctor's manner of living. The charity patients were sure to hold a monopoly of his expert services so long as he kept to his mode of life. Naturally they were not eager for a reform. Most of the young men who dropped in almost every night to enjoy a quiet little game, or to moisten their parched throats with Dr. Wallace's best bourbon, would have found it difficult to conceal their chagrin had they noticed in their host any yearning for a return to the straight and narrow path. But wise old Mammy knew full well that unlimited free drinks would finally mean limited food and fuel, clamoring collectors and loss of credit.

Not only did Mammy look with small love on most of Doc Andy's friends, but she deeply resented her young master's shyness with women.

"No doctor ain't a gonter git along 'thout



women folks any mo'n preachers kin. Women is allus a-thinkin' about they sick souls an' bodies, an' when they ain't a-worryin' 'bout they own, they is a-tryin' to heal some other pusson's. It's allus physic or prayer wif women. They is got ter hab doctors an' preachers, an' doctors an' preachers is got ter hab them."

But Dr. Wallace either would or could not overcome his terror of the fair sex. He managed to conceal it where charity patients were concerned, by presenting a cold, stern exterior, thereby scaring them until the wiser among them learned that he was more afraid of them than they were of him. Some of these women almost worshipped the young doctor, with the kindly, sympathetic mouth which he tried so hard to make grim. Some of them even divined that he was not happy — and wondered why. Dr. Wallace had meant to make more of his youth and his talents. His dream had been so much larger than the reality — this stupid existence with its humdrum days and carnival nights.

But through it all, Mammy patiently waited, serenely confident that sooner or later Doc Andy would come to his senses and turn over a new leaf.

While Dr. Wallace and his two guests played slowly and silently, Mammy bustled in and out

of the room, pausing a moment now and then at her master's side.

The host dealt the cards deftly, and the big, silent young man at his left opened up with a small bet. Peter Roche was a slow and wary player. Stanley, who sat on the doctor's right, played quickly and recklessly. The furtive eagerness with which he glanced at his cards was an indication that winning or losing meant more to him than he cared to confess. Grasping a huge pile of red and blue chips, he shoved them into the center of the table.

"I see, Stanley, you are determined to break me," declared Dr. Wallace gaily, placing his last chip on the pile. "I reckon I'll have to borrow from Peter. Don't go, Mammy, you might bring me good luck."

"Me bring you good luck, Doc Andy! I'd er brung it long ergo if'n I could er. I's mo' of er hoodoo, I's afeard."

The host helped himself from Peter's pile.

"I call!" finally he cried.

He won. As he raked in the stacks of red, white and blue chips, Peter smiled grimly at the discomfiture of his fellow guest.

"Bluffing, as usual!" he muttered under his breath. Stanley's handsome black eyes glit-



tered greedily as his host gleefully piled up his winnings.

"See, Mammy, what did I tell you? I had awful luck all evening until you came in."

"No, sir, I nebber bringed no good luck," grumbled the old negress, "mus' be somebody else. But listen! Ain't dat a bell a-janglin?"

"I don't hear anything."

"Well, I hearn sompen, an I's gonter keep on perusin' roun' til I fin' out what it is."

"Get a bottle first!" demanded Stanley, but the old woman marched off without a backward glance, every line of her erect figure and bandana-kerchiefed head plainly indicating that she took orders from nobody but her master.

"I wouldn't stand for her impertinence a minute," said Stanley, resentfully.

"Impertinence! Mammy impertinent to me! Why, man, she has raised me!" declared the host. "I couldn't get along five minutes without Mammy."

Mammy did not return at once. In fact, she was gone so long that Dr. Wallace wondered if, unconsciously, he had done something to offend the dear old woman.

"Don't deal yet, Stanley, please! Let me pay my debts," he said, handing over the stacked chips to Peter.

"Going to stop?" Stanley had a slight sneer on his lips.

"Certainly not — not while I am the winner!"

"Perhaps we had better stop," Peter broke his silence. "Doc doesn't often get a chance to stop winner."

"Pooh, that's all right! But what is that queer noise? It isn't a bell. Mammy," he called, "what's that racket?"

No answer from Mammy, who was noisily unlocking the front door. It was Stanley's deal. His small white hands fingered the cards so rapidly that one could scarcely follow his motions. Peter looked suspiciously at the dealer as he flashed the cards from the pack. Peter opened up with a small bet. He was nothing of a plunger. He played the game of poker with the same quiet caution that he played the game of life. For several rounds the betting was conservative and sensible. Suddenly Stanley came in with an alarming increase.

"Let's whoop her up!"

"I think I'll drop out," was Peter's sane decision. This time Stanley might not be bluffing.

The host wearily counted out enough blue chips for a small raise. He wished his guests

would quit and go home. He wished Mammy would hurry up and get the door open, and that the strange noise he kept on hearing would stop.

Again Stanley came in with a big increase. Dr. Wallace called him. Stanley showed his disgust at the small amount of his certain winnings as he laid on the table four smiling kings.

"Gee whillikens!" whistled Peter. "What sense I did show in going when going was good. You weren't bluffing after all."

The doctor spread out four aces. Stanley had his hand curved ready to rake in the chips. On his countenance was mingled astonishment and rage.

Peter eyed him keenly. Could it be possible that Stanley had stacked the deck so that he might hold the four face cards, and was defeated only by Andrew Wallace's phenomenal luck? Peter had clumsy hands that fumbled the cards, and he was inclined to suspect anyone who was so adroit as Stanley.

Mammy had succeeded at last in opening the refractory door, and again that strange sound filled the old house. Dr. Wallace jumped from his chair, upsetting the card table. The chips, red, white and blue, rolled over the floor. The cards were scattered hither and yon. To the

practiced ear of a doctor there was no doubt about that sound. When Mammy hurriedly returned to the room with a squirming bundle held close in her arms, her master was not astonished.

“Look what some low flung pusson done lef’ on our do’step! Lef’ it ’thout so much as ‘by yo’ leave!’ Wet as a rat, too!”

She laid the bundle on the card table, which Peter had righted, and with trembling hands began unwrapping it, grumbling all the while. The young men stood as though frozen. If Mammy had been preparing to turn loose a rattlesnake, they could not have looked more frightened.

There were many layers around the bit of humanity that had come among them; first, a woman’s blue-serge, rainsoaked jacket; then, a piece of blanket; then, several yards of cheap white flannelette and some bits of coarse lawn.

It was a girl. The stage of its redness made Dr. Wallace and the knowing Mammy decide that it could not be much more than a week old. Such a tiny little girl she was, a philosopher, too, as the moment the wrappings were removed she stopped the incessant wailing and blinked at the company.

Everybody knows that babies do not hold out



their arms to be taken before they are two weeks old, nor do they smile. You may search through all the baby diaries kept by fond parents, and nowhere will you see that baby held out her arms or smiled on the eighth or even the ninth day. But Mammy would have it that this little girl held out her arms to her to be taken, and Doc Andy insisted that she smiled a little three-cornered smile right in his face as he bent over her. At any rate Mammy took her, and the doctor treasured the little crooked smile in his bashful heart.

“Lawd love us! Now ain’t she peart? Come here ter yo’ Mammy, sugar pie! She gonter wrop you up warm an’ snug.”

As the old woman picked up the baby, something fell from the folds of the flannel. Stanley sprang forward to get it, but Peter was ahead of him. It looked like a bundle of legal documents and that was in Peter’s line. It proved to be nothing more interesting than an envelope of patterns, “Baby’s First Clothes.”

“Well, if the po’ thing ain’t been tryin’ ter make some baby clothes! She’s already cut out them lil white rags, an’ I reckon this flannil is fer pettiskirts. Po’ thing! Po’ thing!” Mammy already had forgotten about the low flung pusson.

"Yes, poor thing!" echoed the doctor.

"And so, you are not such a woman hater as we have been led to believe!" exclaimed Stanley, who had been turning over the swaddling rags as though searching for something. He had even slipped his hand into the pockets of the serge jacket.

"I couldn't hate a little fairy baby like this," declared Dr. Wallace.

"I wasn't speaking of the baby but her mother."

"Her mother! Who is her mother?"

"Oh, come now, Dr. Wallace! Don't play the innocent. You are some years older than this foundling, and so are we."

"I don't know what you are talking about — could you mean — but surely not!" The doctor's face wore a blank look at the suggestion in his guest's words and his insinuating glance.

"Yes, he means it!" cried Mammy. "He means it 'caze he ain't got no decency hisse'f an' he 'lows ev'ybody is lak him. I knows I is a ol' black 'oman what ain't got no business a sassin' white folks, but I aint a gonter sot here an let no po' white trash call my young marster out'n his name." The old woman's voice arose almost to a scream.

"Mammy! Mammy! You mustn't say that,"

pleaded Dr. Wallace. "It was a jest on Mr. Stanley's part."

"Jes' a lie! That's what it war. If'n it warn't fer de sweetness and beautifulness er dis li'l lamb I'd be a thinkin' he war a-talkin' that a way jes' ter put us off'n de track an' he was 'sposable fer de baby his own se'f, but Gawd hisse'f couldn't a formed no miricle ekal ter lettin' sech a debble be de paw er sech a angel."

"Mammy! Mammy! Please calm yourself. Remember, he is my guest."

"He was the fust ter fergit it."

Stanley was somewhat nonplussed by the old negress's tirade, but Peter could not conceal his mirth and delight at what he considered Mammy's timely thrust.

"I guess I'll go," and Stanley sullenly took his departure.

"Yes, an I guess you'll stay away, too," Peter muttered as the front door slammed. "You didn't bother to settle up before leaving."

## Chapter 2

### ACCEPTING THE MASCOT

“Doc Andy, I wanter hab a lil talk wif you.”

“All right, Mammy!”

It was the morning after the little creature had been left on Dr. Wallace's doorstep, a morning in late March. Everything seemed swept and scrubbed by the wind and rain of the night before. The young doctor had a feeling that he, too, had undergone a kind of spring cleaning. In the first place, he had slept well, although he had rather expected that the baby's crying would keep him awake. Then, when morning came, he had awakened with a clear brain and a buoyancy of spirits that he had not known for months. He had bounced out of bed, and a moment later Mammy heard him whistling in his bath. The old woman chuckled with joy and gave an extra pat to the little form lying in the crib she had improvised the night before. It was an old trunk. She had fitted a feather pillow in the tray, and there the mite had slept the



sleep of one who had sought and found. Was the mother sleeping, too?

"You lay still, honey, an' go on sleepin while Mammy knocks up some waffles for Doc Andy's brefkus. We women folks mus'n do nothin' ter upset the men folks. He's up two hours 'fo' he usually is, but that ain't nothin' to we alls. We's gonter git his brefkus ready an' say nothin' 'tall. We's gonter manage him, ain't we, honey? You ain't gonter cry none, at leas' not, at the fust beginning. You's gonter be sech a good lil baby, th' ain't nobody hardly gonter know you's aroun'. If you is good, an' the waffles is right an' crispy, an' the sun goes on a shinin', then th' ain't nothin' me'n you can't 'complish."

The sun had gone on shining, the waffles were as perfect as only Mammy's waffles could be, and the small interloper had gone on sleeping, thereby showing the innate tact that Mammy had hoped she possessed—the tact to manage men folks.

Breakfast was cleared away, and the master followed his old servant to the kitchen at her invitation. She felt that she could do her managing of men folks better back in her own domain where she had undisputed sway. Then, too, the baby was there, still peacefully sleep-

ing in the trunk tray. The top of the trunk, propped up with a stick of kindling, acted as a wind shield, protecting the young baby from the current of fresh, cool air that came through the opened window.

"I jes' histed it a minute," explained Mammy. "The angel Gabrul hisse'f couldn't cook waffles 'thout some smudge an' smoke."

The kitchen in the old Grant house was a very pleasant place in spite of the lingering smell of burning fat. Andy had always liked any kitchen where Mammy ruled. Ever since he could remember he had been coming to the kitchen to have a chat with the faithful soul. He could recall the time, in the old days in Virginia, when Mammy had been young—not much older than he was on that morning in March—and he had sat in a high chair in the kitchen and she had made him little thimble-biscuit and gingerbread boys. What a good creature she was!

"How is the baby, Mammy? I hope she did not keep you awake."

The doctor bent over the improvised cradle and peeped gingerly at the bit of downy head that showed above the patchwork quilt, Mammy's best log-cabin pattern, which she had donated unhesitatingly to the cause.

“Keep me awake! Why, Doc Andy, she is the bes’ lil sleeper you ever seed, an’ she lap up her milk jes’ lak a pig. I done foun’ that a baby what sleeps, eats; an’ a baby what eats, sleeps. You done both from the time you was bawn, an’ this here chil’ does the same.”

“I’m glad of that, Mammy. I couldn’t have you kept awake.”

“Well, as fer that, I wouldn’t make no min’ if’n I did. Me’n you’s been a-sleepin too much here lately. I reckon the good Gawd done sent this baby chil’ here to wake us up.”

“Perhaps!” There was a flush on the young man’s cheek. “And now, Mammy, what is the understanding we are to have?”

The old woman placed a chair for her young master where he could see the ray of sunlight that found its way through the crack in the old trunk top and fell directly on baby’s fluffy crown.

“Ain’t she got a sweet lil shape a-lyin’ there under the kivers?”

The doctor gazed thoughtfully at the child’s form showing in a blurred outline under the quilt. It was a sweet little shape from the downy crown to the curve of the back and on to the foot, which asserted itself in a tiny hump. There was something very appealing in that

helpless form, the lines so soft and flowing, accented at certain points as though a great artist had begun to draw a baby's figure and with a few strokes of his charcoal had but indicated the proportions.

"Her har is gonter be gol', shiny' gol'," declared Mammy. "I done look at it sideways, an' I done look at it straight, an' whichever way the light hits it, it sho do shine. Her eyes is blue now, but they is lil gol' flecks in 'em, an' that is a sho sign they is ter turn brown. I is always 'lowed that the putties' pussons of all is them what has brown eyes an' goldin har. Yo' maw was complected that way, an' she was the putties' gal in the whole county. They is right flirtified, they do say, but a gal might be 'lowed ter flirt some."

The doctor smiled at the old woman's talk. He felt she had something to get out of him — what, he could not tell, but whatever it was, he was sure she would not come to the point until her own good time.

"You done had good luck las' night, didn't you, Doc Andy?"

"In cards? Yes, good enough, but I think I'll stop playing cards, Mammy."

"Praise Gawd, that's the bes' luck yit! Looks like you done had a change er luck from

the minute I hearn the baby a-cryin that time I kep' a-thinkin 'twar a bell a-ringing. 'Member?"

"Yes, I think you are right."

"An' this mornin' the gemman named Mr. Carley what done move in the great house a piece up here on Gyardin street done phomed over fer you to come see his cook what is took bad. 'Cose, I ain't thinkin' much 'bout folks a-givin you the dirty wuck ter do, a callin' you in fer niggers, but them folks is rich an' it means they is willin ter pay. 'Tain't no cha'ity call."

"Well, then I had better be going," laughed the young man.

"No, sir, don't you be in no hurry!" interposed Mammy, quickly. "I done tol' Mr. Carley you had yo' office hour ter keep. I wa'nt a gonter let no nigger cook think you didn't hab nothin' ter do but sign her sick-benefit cyard."

"Well, then, I'll finish my pipe."

"What I's a-thinkin' is — I b'lieve this lil lamb is what ol' Marse Bob useter call a muscat."

"A muscat? Oh, yes, a mascot!" suggested Dr. Wallace, leaning over the baby to conceal his grin.



“Yessir, a mascot! Marse Bob done say they bring look luck, them mascots, jes’ so long as they stay with you. An’ now, Doc Andy —” and at this point the old woman took on a pleading tone, and the doctor knew she had at last come to the point “— don’t you sen’ this po’ lil critter ter no orphamige — she’s too sweet ter be brung up in them ol’ long-waisted print frocks with the slimiky skirts an’ pinched-in sleeves. She won’t be no trouble ter nobody but me, an’ I ain’t got a libin’ thing ter do, an’ kin keep keer er her easy as dirt. You won’t sen’ her away, will you, Doc Andy?”

This problem had been uppermost in Dr. Wallace’s mind when he dropped off to sleep the night before, and it was first in his thoughts when he awakened, but somehow it did not seem to be a vexing problem, and he considered it quite calmly. What should he do with the baby? Should he report the matter to the police, and have the woman tracked and made to take care of her own offspring, — that is, if she were still alive? Or should he keep the little thing and, with Mammy’s help, try to raise it?

The thought of giving the child up to the police, to be cared for either by the mother, who evidently had found the job too much for her even in less than two short weeks, or to be sent

to an institution, caused Wallace to have a queer choky feeling in his throat. From the moment that Mammy had unrolled the old blue-serge jacket and the piece of blanket, and he had looked down on the little helpless bit of pink humanity, he had experienced a certain sense of ownership. Stanley's rude suggestion that he, Wallace, was perhaps the father of the child, had not made him angry. He almost wished he could have been her father.

He looked at Mammy as she stood before him, her wrinkled hands trembling as she held them out in appeal, and her good old brown face working with emotion, and the question was settled.

"We'll keep the kid, Mammy, if it won't be too hard on you."

"Oh, Andy, my Andy boy! I knowed you would say it!" but the fact that she sat down on a kitchen chair and covered her face with her apron showed that she had not known it at all. She had spent a night of terrible suspense, fearing that her precious charge would be taken away from her in the morning. The old woman soon recovered her composure, and once more proceeded with her onslaught.

"Now, Doc Andy, while we is on the subjeck, I thinks we mought jes' as well finish it up."

"It seems settled to me. What more is there to say? We'll keep the baby and do our best by it," declared the doctor, knocking the ashes out of his pipe preparatory to making his professional call on the rich neighbor's cook.

"But is we gonter do our bes'? That's what is a-worryin me. Is jes' givin' a chil' a home an' a-lovin it the bes' we kin do?"

"What more can we do, Mammy?"

"If'n this here lil gal starts ter school an' the chilluns fin' out she ain't nothin' but a founlin', what they gonter call her? Ain't they gonter be somebody ter hurt her blessed lil feelin's, an' break her po' lil heart at ev'y turn? An' if'n she grows up an' gits a beau lover, ain't it gonter be hard wif her to have ter 'fess she ain't got no paw an' ain't never knowed her maw."

"That's so, Mammy, but I don't see what we can do about that. It isn't our fault that things are as they are."

"No, sir! 'Tain't our fault things is as they is, but it's gwine ter be our fault if we lets 'em stay as they am. We got ter do a lil lyin', but if Gawd don't fergib us, he ain't what I takes him ter be. If'n we starts out wif a good lie an' sticks to it, it'll come easier an' easier ter us."

The doctor looked mystified. Mammy, the soul of honor, deliberately planning a lie!



“ Well, Mammy, what tangled web are we going to weave? ”

“ We’s a gonter manufacture a maw an’ paw fer this here lamb. We’s gonter make her come in ter this here worl’ lak white folks ought ter come. It don’t make so much diffunce ’bout niggers. Looks lak folks don’t look down on them none fer being onreglar. I reckon they think it’s good enough fer them, but you know, Doc Andy, how it marks a white chil’ not ter have reg’lar parients.”

“ Well, but — ”

“ What’s the reason you couldn’t perten’ lak you was her paw, an’ her maw was yo’ wedded wife what died when the lil baby was bawn? Folks don’t know you much roun’ here, and them what does wouldn’t put nothin’ on you. ’Tain’t so likely fer men folks to be claimin’ wives what they ain’t nebber had, an’ nobody wouldn’t ’spicion nothin’. ’Tain’t lak you was a po’ woman. She would have ter show her stiffgate an’ her ring, an’ then some ol’ scan’le talker would come a-rakin up sompen on her an’ prove her husban’ had a wedded wife in some other town even if she done made up the husban’ an’ there wa’n’t no sich a pusson.”

Mammy paused for breath. The doctor looked at her in amazement. [Could the old woman be crazy?

“ It wouldn't put no mo' 'sponsibility on you than you is already 'sumin'. A dead wife what ain't nebber libed ain't no trouble 'tall. You ain't eben got ter buy her a stroud an' bury her. I knows you is scairt er female women an' ain't got no idea er marryin' one er them what is sho nuf — one made out er meat an' bones — but this here wife what I'm perposin' ter you don't mean nothin', nothin' mo'n jes' a perfection ter this po' lil foumlin' what the good Gawd done see fit ter sen' us.”

“ But suppose the real mother should turn up and even the real father — what then? ”

“ That po' critter ain't gonter turn up, an' as fer the father — low flung debbil — he's not likely ter be hangin' roun' waitin' fer trouble.”

“ Well, Mammy, I shall have to think about it. I can't be a married man and a widower with a family without giving it some thought. I don't like to pretend to be something I am not.”

“ I'll do all the pertendin'! All you'll have ter do will be jes' keep on being solemncholy, jes' lak you is when women folks is roun' anyhow, an' I'll do all the lyin'. I'll gib out you is too hard hit ter mention yo' trouble. I'd kinder lak fer you ter let me sew a black ban' roun' yo' coat sleeve — ”

“Never!” indignantly.

“Nebber min’! Nebber min’!” was the old woman’s quick and tactful rejoinder. “Lot’s er widder men don’t hold ter the wearin’ of mournin’, an’ you is a quiet dresser at bes’ — not lak that flashly Mr. Stanley what looks lak he’s scairt folks won’t be able ter see him comin’ a mile off.”

“Stanley! That reminds me. What are you going to say to Mr. Stanley and Mr. Peter Roche if I decide to be a sorrowing widower?”

“Tell Mr. Peter the truf — he’s the kin’ ter keep his mouf shet; an’ as fer that there Stanley — he’s gone fer good. Mr. Peter done in’mated ter him he was a cheater, an’ he done gone off ’thout settlin’ up. I reckon he owes you money ’sides,” she said shrewdly. “Ain’t that the truf?”

“Well — a — yes, so he does.”

“He done flew de coop — sho’s you’s bawn. Now, Doc Andy, you jes’ glance over the newspaper an’ then maybe you’d bes’ step lively over ter that new house an’ see the cook. She mought die ’fo’ you gits thar an’ you wouldn’t git no fee. We got ter git ter wuck an’ git some money ter git some goods ter make up some slips fer our baby.”

Andy smiled and took the morning paper

which she handed him. He was glad he was to keep the baby, glad the sun was shining and that he felt so clear headed and alert, glad that after so many months he was to have a pay patient. The call might lead to others. A kind of elation filled his soul. He felt awake and full of hope. What was it? Where was the sodden helplessness that had permeated his being of late? Was this a hum-drum day like all the yesterdays and the days before those yesterdays? No! A thousand times no! He did not feel at all like the bereaved young widower that Mammy would have him be; instead, he thought perhaps he might look like some of the insanely-happy, newly-made fathers whom he had seen on his professional visits.

The baby stirred and gave vent to a little whimper. Mammy immediately took it up and began to fondle it.

"Don' you cry, my candy pie! Don' you cry 'til yo' daddy takes hisse'f off."

The doctor smiled and read the paper.

"Listen, Mammy, some poor girl has drowned herself in the river — right down at the foot of this street — by the bridge — young and pretty — no clue to her identity. Evidently a stranger." He read the account of the suicide.

The baby began to yell lustily.

“Go on an’ cry yo’ fill, po’ lil lamb! I reckon it war yo maw, ’caze this here street am the closes’ to the riber, an’ yo’s is the onlies’ tears what is bein’ shed an’ I ain’t a gonter stop ’em. Po’ critter! Po’ critter! Did the readin’ say she had long goldin hair, Doc Andy?”

“No, it doesn’t say.”

I reckon it war wet an’ they couldn’t tell, but I’ll be boun’ it war long an’ goldin an’ she had a trustin’ heart.”

She rocked the baby and began to sing:

“Bye Baby Buntin’!  
Daddy’s gone a huntin’  
Ter git a little rabbit skin  
Ter wrop the Baby Buntin’ in.”

“Well, good-bye, Mammy! I’ll go and make enough to buy the baby a petticoat if the cook of the rich man has not passed me up. In the meantime, please don’t tell anybody I’m a widower and a father until I talk the matter over with Mr. Peter Roche.”



## Chapter 3

### WARM WATER AND MUSTARD

It was a pleasant sensation to be making a call — not a charity one — even though it was only a sick cook. No doubt the Carleys had their own family physician who perhaps was too busy or too superior, to indulge in colored practice. Andrew Wallace was neither busy nor superior. The color of a person who was sick and needed his care made no difference to him. The fact that he could administer to his or her welfare was the only thing that mattered to the young physician.

As he hurried along Garden Street, where he had chosen to cast his lot, he looked with some degree of interest at his neighbors' houses for the first time since he had hung out his shingle. He now viewed them as the abodes of possible future patients — not merely as the habitations of neighbors who were to be avoided as persons who might look askance at his manner of life. He had feared they might do worse than look askance. They might pester him with invitations to come to supper and expect him to be pleas-



ant to their daughters. That he could not and would not do!

The thought came to him as he hurried to the relief of the Carleys' suffering domestic that now that he was about to become, or had become, a father, his child would feel the need of neighbors. He would have to be more friendly for the sake of the infant.

"I reckon I could do that much for the poor little kid," he muttered as he turned in at the Carleys' gate.

The Carleys' house was everything the old Grant house was not, and nothing that it was. From every pore of the red pressed brick of the former mansion, there breathed prosperity and down-to-dateness. It seemed to be as determined to be seen as the old Grant house seemed desirous to melt into its surroundings. Every window and door, every angle of the new house, was accentuated by the gleaming white stone, and the roof of the would-be Colonial porch was supported by pillars of an enamelled whiteness that dazzled the eyes of the beholder.

"God forbid that I should ever become this prosperous!" breathed Dr. Wallace as he made his way along the uncompromising concrete walk, up the palatial steps and touched the electric button at the great front door.

Immediately the door was opened by a pleasant-looking, pink-faced gentleman in a tight grey suit, with a checked apron tied around his waist. He had a rose in his button-hole which struck the predominant note of his ruddy countenance.

"Dr. Wallace! Carley's my name! Glad to see you, Doctor! Glad to see you!" he jerked out. "Cook's awful bad—so bad that I'm afraid we'll have to advertise again. Such a time as we do have with servants! This one is pretty good, and has been with us all of a month! I surely do hate to think of losing her."

"Perhaps we can save her," suggested Dr. Wallace, trying to hide his amusement.

"Well, come right up and see," said the poor man. "I got my own breakfast this morning, and now am trying to fry an egg for my wife. She has been ailing, too, and so has our little girl, Marian."

Wallace's instinct was to ask with interest about the manner of ailment that had attacked the wife and child, but remembering that he had been called in only to see the cook, he refrained.

"I try to keep three servants," the gentleman of the house continued volubly as they

mounted the back stairs leading to the servants' quarters, "but I can't keep even one."

A groan was the only response when they knocked on the door. The doctor entered without further ceremony. The room was in total darkness. The shades were drawn, blinds tightly closed, and where a crack of spring sunlight had tried to find its way into the room, the groaning creature had hung up a strip of carpet.

The atmosphere was so thick and heavy that to call it air was a misnomer. Without a word Dr. Wallace raised the shades and opened the windows and the blinds. The breeze came in with such a rush that for a moment the cook stopped groaning and sat up in bed.

"Whe'fo' you done that? I's too sick fer sich doin's. Shet them thar winders!"

"That's all right, cook! I'm not going to kill you with air, but some ventilation is necessary. Now tell me what your trouble is — but first tell me your name."

The woman, who was a mountain of flesh, looked at the doctor suspiciously for a moment, but encountering his pleasant kindly eyes she heaved a great sigh and sank back on her ticking pillows, which boasted no slips.

"My name am Pearly. I's got a misery all

over — eve'ywhar but my haid an' my laigs an' my back."

"Do your arms hurt, Pearly?"

"No, sir! Thank Gawd my arms ain't a-hurtin!"

"Um-hum! Just where is the pain? Put your hand on the spot." In an aside to Mr. Carley, he whispered: "Sometimes we have to diagnose by elimination."

"De seat ob my misery am here," groaned the poor black Pearly, and she put her hand on the apex of the hemisphere.

"And what have you eaten for breakfast?"

"I ain't et no brefkus. I been a-wallowin in torment sence 'fo' day."

"Too bad! Now, what did you eat for supper."

"I et some crabs."

"Did you drink much water with the crabs?"

"I never drunked no water a tall. I squinched my thu'st wif buttermilk. I ain't never been no hearty eater but I is sho' fond er buttermilk."

Dr. Wallace, in after years, often laughed over the fact that his practice was built on gallons of warm water with a generous sprinkling of mustard.

Pearly's groans ceased. In their place came

gentle snores. The doctor tip-toed from the room and crept softly down the back stairs. As he sought his hat in the front hall he heard a lazy voice issuing from the library:

“Since there is not much the matter with the baby and me, why not just have this young doctor for us, too? It would be so much less trouble than 'phoning for that other doctor. Of course, if we were very sick we couldn't trust him, but I am sure there is nothing serious the matter with us. You say he understands what is the matter with Pearly.”

“Just as you say, my dear! Of course, I would do the 'phoning and it wouldn't be any trouble for you,” came in Mr. Carley's brisk tones.

“Well, call him in!”

Dr. Wallace gladly would have escaped, but before he could reach his hat the energetic Mr. Carley had captured him.

One would hardly think that a turning point in the career of a young doctor would come about through the fact that a rosy gentleman in a gingham apron pounced on him and compelled him to come and meet his wife and child and cure their far from serious ailments. But turning point it proved in the career of Dr. Wallace.



News soon went forth that the richest persons on the street were employing the young physician, and in short order, others began to realize his worth. Pearly was loud in her praises of the young man, and Mrs. Carley declared he understood her constitution better than any doctor she ever had had. His fame as a children's doctor was spread abroad because of his success with little Marian. Starting as a poor young man with no practice, he soon found himself with all he could attend to.

Mr. Carley was the possessor of a large fortune made in a few years from the phenomenal sale of a lotion for straightening kinky hair. He was a kindly, energetic person whose one aim in life, now that he had a fortune, was to spoil his wife by giving her everything she wanted. But what she wanted principally was to be waited on, and servants refused to stay with her for any length of time — this in spite of the fact that Mr. Carley, because of his lotion, posed as a benefactor to the African race.



## Chapter 4

### THE WILY GODMOTHER

Big, kindly, silent Peter Roche saw no reason why his friend should not conform to Mammy's plans if he chose.

"An imaginary dead wife is the only kind you'll ever have, and if it will help out the poor little kid any, why not be a sorrowing young widower? You know I'll be mum for life."

"Of course I can depend on you, but how about Stanley?"

"Gone! Gone for good and all! Already collectors are trying to locate him. You are not the only man he owed. I've always had my doubts about Stanley, and I was almost sure he stacked the cards on us in that last game. If it had not been for a strange run of luck that had come to you, he would have won that big pot and gone off with more of your money."

"Mammy says the baby is a mascot — 'muscat' she calls it — and my luck changed from the minute she was placed on my doorstep. You remember the song from the opera:

' These messengers that Heaven doth send  
Are known as mascots, my good friend.  
Thrice happy he unto whose home  
These kindly hearth-sprites come.'

And do you know, Peter, it looks as though there might be something in the old woman's fancy. Business is certainly picking up, and it isn't charity business either."

Business was picking up. Neighbors and near-neighbors suddenly seemed to realize that a doctor, a very good doctor, was in the old Grant house. Gradually it leaked out that he was a widower. This bit of information spread through Mammy. Andrew Wallace was never known to mention his dead wife, and if some over-zealous sympathizer would try to question him concerning her, he would simply freeze up.

"He loved her so he can't talk about her," would be the verdict. He was much more inclined to expand when the baby was the topic of conversation.

Mammy lived up to her theory of settling on a good lie and sticking to it. She decided that her master's dead wife was named Elizabeth Smith, that she had died in New York where she was born. She had been with her mother, and expected to join her husband after the

birth of the baby. She had died in child birth, and her mother had died soon afterwards of a broken heart. She had no other relations. Her master was so deeply attached to his young wife that he could not hear her name mentioned without pain.

The old woman told the tale so often that she almost began to believe it, and she never varied in her narrative.

“Looks lak I kin ’member what didn’t happen better’n I kin what did,” she would say to herself.

To make the deceit she was practicing irrevocable and thorough, she wrote a letter to her cousin who still lived near the Wallaces’ old home in Virginia, mentioning quite casually the death of Andy’s wife and the fact that she was raising the baby.

“What if Doc Andy ain’t got no kin folks lef’ to mention, you can’t never tell when somebody what knowed you onct is gonter tu’n up. I ain’t a gonter have ’em a walkin’ in on us not knowin’ nothin’ ’bout my baby lamb. My cousin Liza Ann is the talkin’ es’ ’oman I ever seed, an’ when she ain’t a-sewin roun’, she’s a mid-wifin’ roun’, an’ if you tell her a piece er news, it spreads lak grease on a hot skillet,” she muttered as she penned the epistle.

When Mammy wrote a letter, it was a serious matter, especially when she did not have the assistance of her master in "backin' the 'velope." She was sure that Andy would object quite seriously to this move on her part, but she was determined, while she was lying, to lie as well as the devil himself.

"I been a tellin' the truf all my life, an' now I'm a-gotter lie an' make it soun' lak the truf. I knows how the truf ought ter soun'. I'm a-doin' it all fer my baby, an' the good Gawd ain't a-gonter hol' it aginst me."

So casually did she mention the death of Mrs. Andrew Wallace to Liza Ann that the neighborhood newsmonger was entirely taken in. The fact that she had not heard of Dr. Wallace's marriage was immediately forgotten as she went on her rounds rapidly spreading the news of the motherless baby.

The bereaved husband was at a loss whether to laugh or swear when he received several letters of condolence from some of his father's old friends and neighbors.

"I wish you had thought of some other way, Mammy," he said. A package had come from an old lady who had known his mother. In it were knitted socks and a sacque for the baby.

Other gifts came, from old friends and neighbors — rattles, afghans and caps. It looked as though the people of his county felt that they had inadvertently neglected his wife while she was alive and were trying to make up for it now by showering gifts on her baby.

An invitation came to bring his baby back home on a visit.

“Just look at this, Mammy! I feel like a fool.”

“Well, I feel lak I done larned how ter tell a moughty straight lie. Some day you kin take the baby an’ me on a trip home. I’d be pow’ful glad ter git back fer a spell, an’ the folks in our county would be moughty nice ter our lil baby lamb.”

“Mammy, there is no shame in you.”

“Shame! No, I’s as proud as a peacock, an’ ev’ything is a turnin’ out ter suit me.” She didn’t tell Dr. Wallace that she had written another letter to Liza Ann telling her that the baby resembled her mother in that she had brown eyes and golden hair.

The brown in the baby’s eyes had begun to assert itself more and more, and to Mammy’s delight the almost imperceptible fuzziness on the round little head was turning into red-gold duck tails.



"What I tell yer? Ain't she the putties' angel outer heaben?"

A name must be found for the baby, but what name would be appropriate? Dr. Wallace and Mammy called in Peter to advise with them.

"We don't want no common name lak Jane an' Susan an' sich. This here ain't no common baby if she do sleep in a trunk tray. Uncommon folks is slep' in worse than that 'fo' this."

"How about Theodora?" suggested Peter, who was poring over the appendix in the big dictionary trying to find something to suit Mammy's fancy. "It means the gift of God."

"That's too mouf-fillin', an' ifn we cut it short, we'll be a callin' the lamb Dora, an' that soun's too nigrified to my min'. Ain't they some kinder name what means good luck? I been always a favorin' the name er Grace somehow, but it sho is hard on a gal ter name her Grace an' then whin she grows up fer her ter tu'n out ter be fat."

"Esther means a star and also happiness," Peter read from the dictionary.

"Esther is a beautiful name, I think," put in the foster father.

"Yes, an' it war the name of yo' maw's aunt what died jes' 'fo' she war to be married. I



kin jes' 'member her. She war sho some putty lady. Le's name her Esther, Doc Andy!"

So Esther it was. Peter was asked to be godfather, and Dr. Wallace insisted that Mammy should stand as godmother. The baby was christened in due form, and then Mammy was sure that the good Lord was approving of her deceit since He, in a measure, had connived at it. At least He had permitted his representative, the young minister, to make the sign of the cross on Esther's forehead, and when the water was sprinkled on her head, she had laughed instead of crying, which is a baby's usual method of being received into the church. Mammy took this as just one more good omen for her charge, and when, added to that, the sun came out at the crucial moment, peeping through the stained glass window of the church and pouring all the colors of the rainbow on the little form of the unconscious sinner, who through Peter and Mammy had just renounced the World, the Flesh and the Devil, Mammy was sure that not only was the baby's soul saved but also her own.

On the strength of her certain salvation she indited another epistle to her cousin, Liza Ann, announcing that the baby had been christened

Esther and calling to mind the beauty and charm of Andy's great-aunt Esther, who had died on the eve of her wedding. She did not say in so many words that the baby was named for the great-aunt, but Liza Ann was left to draw her own conclusions, which she did to the entire satisfaction of the wily godmother, and Mammy felt that it had not been in vain that she had spent those weary, head-splitting, back-breaking hours with Ol' Miss trying to learn how to read and write.

"I's a po' reader an' a wuss writer, but Gawd be praised, I larned enough whin I was a gal ter spread this here lie an' 'stablish some kind er fambly 'lations fer my baby. She got a pedegree back yonder in Virginia, thanks ter her ol' Mammy."

## Chapter 5

### MAMMY GETS A SURPRISE

Mammy had not had the care of a child since Andrew Wallace was a baby, but her hand had lost none of its cunning. It was a wonderful sight when she bathed and cared for little Esther. Her old hands seemed to be as soft as velvet, and the skill with which she took off and put on baby clothes was marvelous. Dr. Wallace never tired of watching her.

The sacred rite of bathing the baby was performed every morning in the kitchen, and the old woman would have been much offended if he were absent. But the young man did not choose to be absent. Had Mammy's wild tale of his dead wife, Elizabeth, been gospel truth, and had the baby been really his own, he could not have loved her more. No father could have watched the daily improvement in his child with more interest and concern than did Dr. Wallace in this little foundling. How beautifully formed she was! How strong and straight were the little limbs and back! How

she thrived and fattened! Great was their joy when creases were discovered around the plump wrists and ankles, and Venus rings appeared around the neck! The old woman and the young man watched for dimples as astronomers might search the heavens for new stars, and dimples were always appearing, now one on the left elbow, now a pair on the shoulder blades.

"She's the putties' gal baby I's ever seed," Mammy declared. "'Cose, I's allus been partiam ter boy babies, an' if I do say it as shouldn't, bein' as I's yo' black mammy, you was the fattes', cutes', sweetes' baby ever bawn. Dimples! Lawd love us, Doc Andy, but you was peppered as thick wif 'em as a mock-orange."

"Spare me, Mammy! Spare my blushes! Isn't this the day to weigh her?"

"Sho it is!" and then they solemnly got out the sugar scale, which Mammy said was the only kind to weigh such a lump of sweetness on. And when the gain was considerably over the previous week, their joy knew no bounds.

It was a beautiful morning in June. The bath was over, the paraphernalia incident to the rite picked up and put away, the doctor out on his rounds, and the baby fed and peacefully sleeping on the shady back porch.

“Now, old woman, you’d bes’ be shakin’ yo’s’e’f,” said Mammy. Mammy had a way of talking to herself when she was alone. Sometimes she would hold such animated conversations that one would have sworn she had company. Andrew Wallace often amused himself listening to her as her voice came from another room. She would employ two distinct tones of voice, one a high querulous one, and the other her own natural, soft, deep drawl.

“Shake yo’s’e’f, shake yo’s’e’f!” came the querulous note.

“Ain’t I been a stirrin’ sence ’fo’ day?”

“Yes, but you ain’t done nothin’ — nothin’ so’s you kin notice it, but jes’ a playin’ wif that there doll baby. Look at the winders in Doc Andy’s office! Look at ’em, I say! You cyarn’t look thu ’em fer the dirt. Look at the silber! Looks lak pewter fer the need er a lil rubbin’. Look at that ther pile er darnin’! Holes so big Doc Andy won’t know which er way ter put on his socks. Hump yo’s’e’f, nigger! Hump yo’s’e’f!”

“Well, I’m a movin’ fast as I kin,” answered the complaining voice. “Th’ain’t but one er me. There’s that phome a ringin’!”

Mammy had never been able to distinguish the bells in the house. Usually she gave the



telephone the benefit of the doubt and tried that first. She would take down the receiver and then, in dead silence, sit like one who was receiving an electric shock. Finally she would mutter a faint:

"'Lo!" in a whisper. Her tone was so indescribably mournful that the one at the other end of the wire, if there happened to be one left after the long silence, would feel that something sinister and terrible must have happened at Dr. Wallace's. Peter Roche, who sometimes had occasion to telephone his friend, used to say that it reminded him of fishing for catfish. You would feel a nibble, wait patiently, feel another, and, encouraged, pull in, to find nothing on the end of your line.

"'Lo!" Mammy repeated. "I can't a-wantin' no number — I's a answerin' the phome — you done runged me up — I'll excuse you this time, but I's pow'ful busy ter be a answerin' phomes jes' fer fun." She put up the receiver with a jerk.

"I wisht there wa'n't no sich a thing as phomes!" declared the whiny voice.

"How you gonter git the doctor in a hurry 'thout no phome?"

"Sen' a nigger on a mule, lak Ol' Miss an' her mother befo' her done. Gib the callermile



in the fus' beginning — nò use in a-waitin' fer the doctor — an' then sen' a nigger on a mule."

Again a bell, this time quite loud and angry in its jingling! Mammy took down the receiver with resignation.

"Lo!" in her cat-fish nibbling manner.

"What number?" briskly from central.

"Great Gawd! It mus' er been the front do'!" She dropped the receiver and hastened to the front of the house. No one at the front but a brisk knocking at the back door.

"You ol' fool nigger!" she cried, going to the kitchen door which stood hospitably open.

On the back porch was a young woman holding a little girl by the hand.

"I rang the door bell repeatedly." The tone was a little sharp.

"You mus' 'scuse me, lady, but I gits so imfused over bells. I cyarn't fer the life er me tell whicht is whicht. I thought you was the phome. Won't you come in an' set a spell? Doc Andy, I mean Doc Wallace, is jes' stepped out ter see the sick an' sufferin', but he'll be back 'fo' so long."

Mammy thought the young woman and her child were patients, and she was determined not to let them escape the doctor. To be sure, they might be charity patients, and she was

not encouraging that class too much, as she felt her master was inclined to do for them and neglect the more profitable kind. The mother had rather too much dignity in her bearing to be seeking charity, and both mother and child were well, although simply, dressed.

"You kin go in the office an' set, or you kin jes' res' yo'se'f out here on the po'ch. I ain't ter say spruced up the office yit 'cause I'se been so took up wif the baby."

"We can wait here just as well."

Mammy hastily got a chair for the mother and put a stool for the little girl.

"Moughty putty lil chil'! How ol' is you, honey?"

"Free!" The child spoke in a singularly independent, dignified way in spite of her baby talk.

"Well, you is moughty smart fer yo' age. My baby, sleepin' in de buggy yonder, ain't but free months old. She is smart, too." Mammy was longing to show off the baby, but the visitor expressed no interest at all in the little thing. Her manner was preoccupied, and even praise of her own child did not draw a smile from her.

"When will Dr. Wallace return?" she asked, coldly.

“ I ain’t ter say sho that he’ll be back fer some time. They’s a heap er sickness jes’ now, an’ looks lak folks is plum determined ter hab Doc Andy,” said Mammy, proudly. “ Is you a-wantin’ ter see Doc Andy per-feshumly? Whicht er yo’ is ailin’?”

“ Neither. I merely want to see him on business.”

“ Well, then, lady, I reckon you’d bes’ come back, ’cause he ain’t li’ble ter be home ’fo’ dinner.” Mammy’s interest in the visitor was waning.

“ Why didn’t you tell me so sooner?” The tone was certainly sharp. Mammy looked at her in surprise. She was a very pretty young woman to have such a cold, hard voice.

“ I ain’t never held out no hopes he would be in soon.”

The woman arose to go but seemed to be undecided. She seated herself again, and in a more friendly voice said:

“ You have been with Dr. Wallace for some time, auntie?”

“ Eber sence he wa’ bawn, ’ceptin, er co’s’e, whin he wa’ off ter college an’ studyin’ in hospitals.”

“ Oh, then, perhaps you can tell me of some of his friends. Have you ever happened to

see a Mr. Stanley when he has called here?"

"Stanley! Lawd love you, lady, I should say I is! Why he jes' lef here 'bout free months ago. I reckon he ain't a neber gonter come back neither, 'cause he went off in sech a hurry a owin' money ter Doc Andy — money what he done borrowed 'sides money what he done los' at cyards. We alls don't know whar he. Mr. Peter, he say he gone fer good. An' I hope it's so. That Stanley wa' a bad man!"

"Don't you dare to say that about my farver!" The little girl stood before Mammy with blazing eyes. "You are a bad old nigger and I hate you!"

"Yo' father! Lawd 'a mussy, lady, I didn't know you wa' Mr. Stanley's wife whin I spoke up so. You mus' 'scuse me, lady, an' you, you po' lil chil', we ain't none of us knowed he wa' eben married. He ain't neber said so. I done heard him — but neber min' what I done heard — I is a fool ol' nigger an' I is a bad ol' nigger. I wisht you would come in an' wait ter see Doc Andy. Maybe you would take a bite ter eat or a cup er tea er sompen. Gawd knows, lady, I wouldn't er said nothin' ter hurt you or yo' lil chil' fer nothin' on Gawd's green yearth. Now, won't you come in an' res' yo'se'f a spell?"

"No, I must go. Come, Lucy!"

The voice was not quite so hard now but it was decidedly weary.

"Jes' a mug er milk fer yo' lil chil'! Don't you want some milk, honey? Mammy didn't mean ter hurt yo' feelin's, an' she thinks you is a fine lil baby ter be a standin' up fer yo' paw the way you done."

The old won-an's voice was so appealing and her manner so conciliatory that Lucy was prevailed upon to drink the milk, but the mother would not wait for a cup of tea. Without a word of thanks to poor Mammy, who was in abject misery over having hurt their feelings, the visitors departed.

"Ain't eben said 'peep turkey' 'bout my baby, neither," she grumbled.

"Whe'fo' they gonter say 'peep turkey' ter you arfter you done 'sulted um?"

"Th'ain't said nothin' 'fo' I 'sulted um. They had plenty er chanct ter notice lil Esther 'fo' I done rip out 'bout that there Stanley. He is sho a bad aig, but his wife ain't got the innards ter be a bad aig. I reckon we done see the las' er her too. I hope so! Doc Andy is got all he kin do ter make a libin fer us all 'thout lendin' any mo money ter these here Stanleys."



## Chapter 6

### JUSTIFYING A LIE

“Tell me something more about my mother, Mammy. Tell me everything all over — all about her long golden hair and her blue, blue eyes — how she walked and how she talked and how she laughed. I just know she laughed like music, didn’t she, Mammy?”

“Yes, child, she larfed an’ it soun’ lak lil streams er water a-running over pebbles.”

“And her hair, was it very, very long?”

“Yes, honey, so long she could set on it, an’ it waved from the roots clean down ter the en’s. It wa’ gol’, pure gol’, an’ the ripples in it useter ’min’ me or the win’ a-blowin over ripe wheat.”

“Was it as long as Rapunzel’s?”

“Who dat?”

“Now, Mammy, you remember the girl in the fairy story I read you the other day who let down her hair so her lover could hang on to it and climb in the window.”

“Oh, that there gal what wa’ named some kinder Dutch name what meant turnip salad! I ’member her well enough.”



“She must have loved him a whole lot, Mammy — more than tongue can tell — to let him hurt her so bad. I know it hurt because I let my kitty climb up my plait once just to see how it felt, and it pulled until I had to cry. Of course a lover would be heavier than a kitten and he would hurt even more, but maybe you would love a lover so much more than a kitten that you wouldn’t mind. Do you reckon my mother loved my father enough to let him pull her hair that hard, Mammy?”

“Yes, chil’, I’s sho she did.” Mammy looked very solemn when she made this assertion.

“But he loved her too much to hurt her, didn’t he, Mammy?”

“Er — er — yes, sho, sho!”

“Mammy, it seems so strange that nobody has a picture of my mother. I have tried and tried to make a picture of her but I make such poor noses. I do wish Daddy could talk about her to me. Was her nose like mine?”

“Well — er — kinder lak yo’s, an’ kinder mo’ growed up lak. Now, honey chil’, why don’t you run out an’ play? Mammy’s gonter bake you a lil cake an’ if you keeps on a talkin’ she cyarn’t git to it. The chilluns is a callin’ you ter come and skate, but don’t you let none er them roll over you.”

“ All right, Mammy! But save me some raw cake batter — I just love it! ”

Esther was off like a breeze. Mammy watched her until she was out of sight, her old brown face working with emotion. Ten years had passed since that windy, rainy night in March when the blue-serge jacket with its precious inclosure had been left on Dr. Wallace's door-step. What years they had been! Mammy looked back on them with extreme satisfaction. From the moment the baby had been taken out of the wet, the whole tenor of Dr. Wallace's life had changed. The responsibilities of being a father and a widower had brought him to a realization of his frivolous mode of living and had created the desire in him to be the man his youth had promised. The public had assisted him in his endeavor by being sick and by calling on him to heal it. His practice, like the beanstalk in the story Esther loved to hear him tell, grew and grew — over night, as it were. Had he still wanted to spend his time in riotous living, he would not have been allowed to do so by the patients who flocked to his door. They seemed now to have no trouble in finding the doctor's modest sign that was hung in rather than out.

The undesirable acquaintances he had ac-

quired, on first coming to that southern town to settle, gradually dropped out of his life as completely as Stanley had. Faithful, silent Peter Roche remained, and was a frequent visitor at the old Grant house, where he was ever warmly welcomed by Mammy and Esther as well as the doctor.

Esther could not help loving Peter. He was an ever-ready playmate and listener.

And Peter had to listen to many confidences when he made his visits to the Wallace household. Esther saved up all her joys and sorrows for him. The doctor must tell him of Esther's many perfections, of her beauty and charm, her wit and cleverness, her loving heart and cheerful disposition, her artistic talent and ready understanding of the best in poetry. Mammy must hold forth in like manner. The old woman was sure that her baby child was the best and most beautiful baby child in the whole world. No longer did she insist that the little Andy had been the cutest, sweetest, most dimpled person possible. The child Andy had a rival in the child Esther.

"Jes' look at her when she's a skatin' wif the chillun on the block! They's all dirt beside her. Look how she hol' her haid! Look how she skims along on them roller skates. She's

jes' as much at home on them as a buzzard is up in the ar."

Truly the little waif had repaid her benefactors a million times over. In the first place she had proved from the beginning to be a perfectly healthy, normal child. Her teeth had come in when they should have done so, and at the prescribed age she had lost them, thereby presenting a snagged tooth smile that Mammy and Dr. Wallace thought most engaging. The so-called children's diseases passed her by. When all the children on the block were in the throes of whooping cough, and the schools were full of it, little Esther seemed to be immune. Measles and chicken-pox would none of her. She did not even catch colds.

"She ain't no contagious baby, that's sho!" Mammy declared proudly. "She's a good-luck baby!"

Esther was not perfect by any means, although those who loved her insisted she was. She had a quick temper of her own, was lazy about her lessons, and far from tidy. Her temper, like most gusty ones, soon blew itself out. And fairy stories were so much more interesting than long division that one could hardly blame her for preferring to curl up on the sofa with Hans Andersen rather than to



work silly examples that got one nowhere, or if they did, were of no earthly good when they did get one there. The doctor wondered what she would do when she came to fractions and decimals if she could not grasp long division; and, later on, algebra and geometry would have to be grappled with.

“Th’ain’t no use in worryin’, Doc Andy, ’cause she’s a larnin a lil bit ev’y day. Time was whin two didn’t mean no mo’ ter her than one, an’ then ’fo’ you knowed it she war a addin’ an’ ’stractin’ as putty as you please. I ain’t studyin’ none bout rithmutics. They kin keep keer er theyselves. What I’m a botherin’ my haid over is her keerlessness ’bout her things. I kin straighten her bureau an’ closet ev’y day, an’ ev’y day she kin stir ’em up jes’ same as ifn she wa’ a makin’ batter bread. Rithmutics ain’t no good ter a gal ’cep’ jes’ ter keep from gittin’ short-changed, but keepin’ her clothes neat an’ nice an’ bein’ tidy is larnin’ she’ll have ter use ev’y day of her life.”

“Maybe you spoil her, Mammy. If you did not do it for her, perhaps she would learn to do it for herself.”

“Yessir, an’ I reckon if you wa’n’t allus a helpin’ her with her sums, she’d larn herself, too.”



The old woman and her master were constantly playfully accusing each other of spoiling the child. Sometimes it got to be in earnest when Esther developed some unforeseen trait. Dr. Wallace was sure it was due to Mammy's indulgence of her charge, while the negress was certain the foster father was responsible. Sometimes she even harked back to failings in his family and freely intimated that the child had inherited a tendency from some dimly-remembered ancestor.

Once the little thing had played truant from school for several days. It was during the measles epidemic and the teacher, taking it for granted the disease had attacked the doctor's daughter, had not looked up the absent one as was her custom. Finally, when Esther's perfidy came to light and it was discovered she had spent the week at the public library delightfully and profitably employed in reading the Arabian Nights, Mammy had exclaimed:

"Jes' lak yo' paw, Doc Andy! Marse Bob Wallace was eternally stealin' off an' goin' feeshin' when Ol' Miss thought he wa' safe at school. She useter say he nebber would git eddicated, an' lowed I larned farster 'an what he done, 'ceptin' I nebber could go but jes' so fur, whilst Marse Bob all of a suddent knowed

it all. Lil Esther is gonter be jes' 'zactly lak him."

The doctor smiled grimly. Sometimes Mammy seemed to fool herself completely into believing that Esther had a perfect right to inherit his family's characteristics. She had told her tale so often when the baby was first left to their tender mercies, and afterwards had been forced by the little girl to repeat it over and over to her so often that now it seemed to be something that had really happened. Only when the child demanded a picture of her dead mother, or details of the wedding, or the exact location of her grave, was Mammy stumped.

But never did the old woman regret the deception she had practiced, and as Esther got older, making more and more friends, she would rejoice in the fact that her baby could hold up her head with the best of them. Esther had a real talent for making friends. She was hand in glove with the ash man and the ice man and the man who delivered the afternoon paper. She was a favorite at school with teachers and children. The blind beggar who sat on the church steps learned to know her voice. Indeed, Mammy often complained that she did not even require that her friends should be clean, and the doctor objected that they did not have to be

interesting for his daughter to take them under her fairy wings. The fact that they were living and breathing seemed enough for the child.

"I believe she loves the whole world. She cannot hate to save her sweet life," the doctor declared to Mammy when they were engaged in their favorite pastime of congratulating themselves that their doorstep had been the one chosen out of all the thousands of others on which to leave the baby.

"Don't you believe it, Doc Andy, don't you believe it! That there chil' is jes' as good a hater as she is a lover, but she is slow ter hate. Some folks she jes' nachully 'spises. When she hates anybody, it looks lak she hates 'em all over. I done tuck notice that she don't say nothin' when them folkes is roun', but she jes' sets quiet lak an' is extra politeful."

There was only one thing Dr. Wallace would not do for his adopted daughter and that was to talk to her about his fictitious wife. He could not bring himself to do it. He well knew that in his silence he had been party to the fraud worked by Mammy on the public and on the little Esther, but nevertheless he drew a certain satisfaction from the circumstance that never once had he spoken of the dead wife. He simply kept his mouth tightly closed whenever she was alluded to.

Mammy had so drilled the child, and their neighbors and acquaintances, that they never spoke to the doctor of the young woman who was supposed to have been so beloved by him that he could not trust himself to mention her name. As the years passed the role became easier and easier for him to play before the neighbors and friends, but more and more difficult as far as the child was concerned.

Perfect sympathy and understanding existed between man and little girl except on that one subject, and as is usually the case, that one subject seemed ever present. Sometimes he would feel that he must break his silence and talk to her of that mother around whose memory he well knew Esther was weaving wonderful romances, but his conscience had drawn the line between being party to a lie and actually telling it and he never could bring himself to make the attempt. There were moments when, in his heart, he fiercely blamed Mammy for the deceit he had been forced by her to practice, but then something would occur to make him glad that things were as they were.

On one occasion Esther had come home from school with flushed cheeks and shining eyes because of something that had happened. A little girl had been guilty of a very naughty



deed. She had been caught going through children's coat pockets and had been sent home. Many pennies and pencils had been missed during the session, and now the whole class was sure that the convicted one was responsible for the theft of all the lost articles.

"And, Daddy, they said such terrible things about poor Amelia — things that make me so sorry for her."

Esther had burst into the dining-room just as the doctor was being seated and while Mammy was bringing in dinner. She flounced into her seat, throwing her hat and coat carelessly on a chair. They slid to the floor.

"What did they say? It seems to me that a little girl who steals must have something wrong with her brain. Is she poor?"

"Oh, Daddy, that's the worst part of it! She is not at all poor, but wears the flossiest clothes at school and is so pretty! They say she is 'dopted — 'dopted by rich people. I didn't know what 'dopted meant, but the girls told me. They say she doesn't even know who her really truly mother and father were. Her 'dopted mother got her out of a 'sylum. She chose her just because she was so pretty. And now all the girls at school say they reckon her really truly mother and father were bad and



she got stealing from them. Oh, Daddy, I'm so glad I'm not 'dopted!"

Esther ran around the table to give the doctor an extra kiss, administering a little hug to Mammy's legs as she passed the old woman, who was standing near the table, a covered dish in her hands and her brown old face working strangely.

"Now, if I'm bad it will be all my own fault, won't it, Daddy? You are so good and I am sure my mother —"

Esther suddenly remembered Mammy's admonitions concerning the mention of her mother to her father and stopped short. Her eyes filled with tears, and she looked longingly into the doctor's face. If he would only talk to her about her mother, what a comfort it would be! His mouth closed tightly but he put his arm around the child and drew her close to him, giving an appealing glance to Mammy. The old woman arose to the occasion as was her wont.

"Yo' maw wa' a angel, yes, a angel! You ain't gonter take no lowness arfter her. An' she wa' that 'ticular an' tidy 'bout her things — allus a puttin' 'em away an' foldin' 'em up' I never yet seed yo' maw a throw her coat an' hat on the flo'."

“Didn't you, Mammy? Well, I'm going to try and be like her. 'Scuse me a minute, Daddy!” The child picked up her hat and coat and meekly took them in the hall where Mammy had put a rack under the stair at a convenient height for short arms to reach.

Mammy looked triumphantly at her master. He could not help but feel that she had been right in protecting Esther as she had done. The lie was justified.

“You'd better tell her that her maw wa' good at rithmutic. It mought give her some ambition ter larn,” she whispered.

The doctor smiled. He could not but be glad that his little girl did not have to contend with poor Amelia's handicap. As she slid back in her place, he looked at her with satisfaction. She must never know that she too was adopted. Never must she feel that there was no use in trying because she had inherited any undesirable tendencies. Every fault must be her own fault, to be overcome by herself.

## Chapter 7

### THE IMAGINARY PORTRAIT

“ Peter, how did it happen you never saw my mother? Haven't you known Daddy for ever and ever so long? ”

“ Yes, pretty long! ”

“ Are you sure you never saw her? ”

“ Sure as can be! ”

“ Weren't you in New York when Daddy was, after you finished college? ”

“ For a while. ”

“ Don't you think it would have been more friendly-like if you had gone to see my mother after Daddy married her? ”

“ Well — er — yes — ”

“ Of course it would have been! Oh, Peter, it seems to me so careless that nobody has a picture of my mother. Daddy has never talked to me about her — never since I've been born. Mammy tells me things, but I want to know so much more. You see, Mammy only saw her for a little while because she died so young, and then Mammy brought me here. Daddy had come here to make a home for Mother and me. ”

"Twelve years ago, wasn't it?"

"Yes! Next week is my birthday. You see, Peter, I always give Daddy a present on my birthday just because I am so glad he is my Daddy, and this year I am making him a water-color painting of my mother."

"Your mother!" The phlegmatic Peter was aroused.

"Yes, Peter! Of course it is a work of the imagination, but I am almost sure it is like her. Mammy has told me exactly how she looked. She looked a little like me — quite like me in fact — but her eyes were as blue as the mountains way off, not nut brown like mine, but the same shape, and her hair almost touched the ground, and it was golden and wavy, not curly like mine and not so reddish as mine. Her nose started out to be like mine but decided to be a little longer. Maybe when I am all the way grown up, my nose will turn down — at least not turn up so much. I'd like for it to get to be more like my mother's. Noses are so hard to draw. I practice on them all the time. My arithmetic is a sight because I have drawn teacher's nose all up and down the margins. I am getting now so I can do three-quarter noses — almost as hard as fractions but lots more fun — and I tell you they are hard. It is

easier when you get to painting, because you can kind of smudge in some shadows and cover up your faults. I'm working so hard on the picture of Mother that I am not trusting to smudges to cover up anything."

"Are you doing the whole thing from imagination?"

"No, Peter dear, I am posing for it myself. I look in the mirror and make believe I am twenty years old. I try to imagine I love somebody a whole lot — not the way I love Daddy and Mammy and you, too, Peter dear, but the way Rapunzel loved the prince — enough to let him climb in the window by my hair; or the way the princess must have loved King Thrushbeard when she worked as a kitchen maid for him and carried home scraps in an old tomato can; or the way Maid Maleen loved the prince — so much that she didn't even mind being shut up in a dark tower for his sake, without so much as a ray of light to comb her long hair by. After I think of myself this way, it seems as though my nose turns down a wee bit. Daddy says he thinks my nose is pretty — 'Tip tilted like the petals of a rose,' he says."

"Well it is a rather happy nose," laughed Peter. "When are you going to show me your picture?"



“Now, if you want me to! You see, it is not done yet. I am glad I started on a thick piece of water-color paper because I've had to rub a lot. It may turn out to be a little woolly. That is what the drawing teacher calls it when you have to rub out a lot, but I believe it is better to try hard and have it woolly than to get right just by accident. This picture of my mother is very serious. When you are putting your whole soul into anything, somehow you don't want to be just hit or miss, do you, Peter?”

“I reckon not!”

Esther was developing a decided taste for drawing and painting. Her artistic talent first evinced itself when she began to ply a pair of blunt scissors on the papers she cut for Mammy's kitchen shelves. Instead of the pattern of little triangles and gimcracks that Mammy had taught her to cut by folding the newspapers many times, the child's imagination directed the scissors so that a frieze of birds was the result; then came flowers and trees. Later came a great day when she found she could cut a fairy with wings, a star on her forehead and wand in her hand. Mammy was proud indeed of these wondrous shelf-papers, and when they got so soiled that they had to be replaced, she could not bear to destroy them but folded them

up and packed them away in the attic trunk.

A pair of sharp-pointed scissors was finally permitted the young artist if she promised never to use them when she had company. That pair of silver scissors, presented by Peter, was Esther's pride and joy. Now she could cut reindeer with branching antlers, running through a forest where the bare trees with their intricate pattern of limbs must be treated with infinite patience and skill. The household marveled at her patience and the untiring efforts she made to accomplish her ideal, whether it was a decoration for Mammy's shelves or a paper doll for one of her admiring playmates.

The dolls were exquisite creations of the imagination. All of the princesses in the fairy stories had to play their parts as paper dolls, and if one of them was said to have a dress like the stars, another like the moon, and another like the sun, have them they must.

Esther lived in a land of make-believe. From the time she could understand, Dr. Wallace had entertained her with fairy stories. And Mammy had told her wonderful tales of animals — the folk lore of the negroes. When she learned to read, it was feared she might spend too much of her time with her nose buried in a book, but she was too popular a person for that. The

children of her acquaintance would not permit it, and so she must take her fairy fancies into her games. She was forever getting up tableaux. Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Puss-in-Boots, Snow-White and the Dwarfs were presented many times. A box of tissue paper costumes, somewhat the worse for wear after several performances, was kept in the attic, but flowing hair and a gold paper star on one's forehead often kept the audience from seeing the rumpled state of the costume.

From tableaux grew plays. Plays must be written and acted. Of course this subtracted somewhat from the time that should have been spent on the difficult mathematics, but Dr. Wallace felt that, after all, this was the way his little daughter had of growing and he must not stunt her growth by trying to discourage it. Mammy had her doubts about "play actin' an' sich," as she had been preached to in church about the iniquities of the theatre, but when Esther explained to her that if you didn't do a thing too well, preachers did not mind it, the old woman was entirely satisfied.

"It 'pears ter me lak it's pow'ful nachel, so let it be jes' as you say, honey chil'. I ain't nebber been ter a real show, so I ain't prepared ter say what kin be did."

Sometimes the doctor was pressed into service in these wonderful private theatricals. Usually he was cast as the kingly father, but sometimes he had to take the part of the wicked magician. Even Peter had been known to act in them, always under outward protest, but secretly pleased at being included, although his part was always a silent one, or almost silent. He had acted the faithful henchman; the huntsman who could not make up his mind to kill Snow-White but took instead the heart of the doe to the wicked step-mother; also, Faithful Henry, who bound his body with iron bands to keep his heart from bursting with sorrow when his master was changed into a frog. When, in this latter impersonation, his heart swelled with joy and pride at the liberation of the prince, the noise the bands made in bursting was a marvel of histrionic talent, so Esther declared.

Mammy was always the Fairy Godmother, disguised as an old witch. The old woman was a little squeamish about such goings on, living in constant fear that "members of my sassiety" might hear of it, but Esther insisted that she must act, so act she must.

A true prince was wanting in the all star cast. Esther's best friend, Marian Carley, who was blessed with a pair of long shapely legs,



usually had to don the tights and play prince, but she longed to be chosen as Sleeping Beauty and did not at all relish having to be nothing but a boy.

Play-acting had lately given way somewhat to drawing and painting. All of the time Esther could spare from her lessons, and a great deal that she couldn't, was spent with pencil and brush. Dr. Wallace had hunted up a teacher for the child. Miss Hunter recognized that her pupil had a decided talent, and took a great interest in her. She hoped to be able to give a foundation for the fanciful imagination to build on, especially since the young artist had the rare talent of being able to catch a likeness.

"Imagination is a great gift, but it will be just so much more of an asset if it goes hand in hand with good drawing and true values," she would tell her eager pupil.

Esther had been working every afternoon for many days on the birthday present for her father. Her companions, headed by Marian, were impatient of this latest fad of their friend. They longed for a return to her early manner of paper dolls and fairy tableaux, something in which they might join, but nothing would lure the girl from the mirror where she studied her youthful features with an absorbed intensity.



When Peter asked Esther to show him the picture she was painting, she ran eagerly to get it. "If only he had seen the original!" was her thought as she hurried back with the painting. She was almost afraid to show it to Mammy. Suppose she would not recognize it! Suppose the idea she had formed of her dead mother was entirely an erroneous one! She had drawn the picture for her father, but she was determined to guard her secret closely. If they saw the likeness, then her happiness would be complete. If not, then she had simply failed to grasp the appearance of her poor dead mother, or had failed to record the image with her inexperienced pencil and brush. Either alternative was more or less of a tragedy to the child.

"Peter, dear, I have worked so hard," she said hesitantly as she handed him the water-color painting. "I don't think it is so very clever, and I am sure Miss Hunter would tell me to begin all over again and get it crisper. But you do think it looks a little like me, don't you? Do you think it looks as though it might have been my mother?"

Peter's hand trembled a little as he held the picture from him to get the right light and distance. The man was one of those silent, inarticulate persons who are full of sympathy and

understanding that cannot be expressed. Sometimes one feels that a person is silent from the fact that he has nothing to say, but with Peter, his friends knew that he was reticent from a certain inability to give expression to his inmost feelings. The feelings were there, but where emotions were concerned, he had no words at his command. When Esther looked eagerly into his face for his verdict concerning her poor little painting, all he could say was:

“Yes, I think it might have been.”

“Really, Peter?”

“Really!”

The man was astonished at the skill the child had shown in the little drawing. He felt that she had in a measure expressed what she had intended. It was a picture of herself grown up into a woman of ethereal loveliness, who showed in the depths of her violet eyes that she had suffered. The mouth smiled a little wistfully, but smiled. The yellow hair was parted in the middle and braided into two long plaits which fell across her bosom. What did it matter that the hair was too yellow for mortal hair? What if the mouth was too vivid a red? What if the much used eraser had almost rubbed a hole in several places? One felt that the little artist had been sincere — had had something to

express and had expressed it with astonishing fidelity.

It was well drawn and showed a decided likeness to Esther. Her long practice in noses had served her well. She had been able to continue her own tip-tilted member to a dignified length, had kept the eyes shaped like her own but had painted them a deep violet instead of brown.

“Do you think Daddy and Mammy will recognize it, Peter?”

“Can’t say, my dear. Ask them.”

“Not for worlds! I am not going to tell them who it is but just watch their faces and see if they know. Don’t you tell them. Promise!”

“Umm — sure, not if you say I shouldn’t!”

Peter regretted exceedingly that he was an honorable gentleman. He longed to put Dr. Wallace and Mammy on their guard, knowing that they would do anything in the world to keep disappointment from their child. She had hoped so keenly that they would recognize the picture of her mother that failure would be sure to grieve her deeply.

## Chapter 8

### A WONDERFUL BIRTHDAY

The fifteenth of March had been determined upon by the conspirators as the proper birthday for Esther. Dr. Wallace had rather leaned towards putting it later in the month on the day the baby came to him, but Mammy insisted otherwise.

“Some ’quisitive pusson ’ll be sho ter ’member on sich an’ sich a day they wa’n’t no baby chil’ here. No, Doc Andy, if she wa’ bawn in New York, she wa’ bawn thar, an’ we’s got ter make ’lowances fer it. I done studied out this here lie til it’s the same as truf.”

And so the birthday was set at the fifteenth, and thereafter that day was ever a gala day with the household. Year after year, from the time when the cake was no bigger than a muffin with one candle decorating it, Peter Roche always came to supper on that evening.

The presenting of birthday gifts came first. Usually it was just before supper. Mammy always provided a feast for the occasion, and

the table was set with great nicety. Dr. Wallace had brought from the old home in Virginia many fine old bits of silver and furniture that had been in his family for generations. Mammy kept the drop-leaf mahogany dining-table rubbed up to the highest state of polish. A spot on it would have been regarded by her as seriously as a blot on the family escutcheon.

“Th’ain’t no varnish nor nothin’ on the Wallace furnisher any mo’ than they is on the fambly. Good furnisher an’ good famblies don’t need no varnish. I looks arfter the furnisher wif elbow grease, an’ the fambly is done polished up wif eddication fer so many gemerations it jes’ shines of its own nachel brilliancy,” the old retainer declared.

Truly, the table was a beautiful sight on little Esther’s twelfth birthday. Pink shaded wax candles in massive silver candelabra threw a soft light over the polished table. In the centre was a bowl of tea roses sent by Peter because he always felt that Esther and tea roses were akin. Of course, his inarticulate handicap kept him from saying so. He hoped some one understood why he had always sent tea roses for the birthday feast. Whether anyone else saw that the color down in the heart of a tea rose was the same as came in the shadows of the child’s soft con-



tours, he could not tell, but nevertheless he derived extreme satisfaction from knowing it himself. Her pretty little ears might have been the petals of a rose, with their creamy pink glow; also the tip-tilted nose that she felt such unreasonable scorn of.

Esther had been in a strange mood all day, one moment flying around like a will o' the wisp, the next subdued and pensive. She had mixed up the greatest common divisor and the least common multiple in an astonishing manner at school, until the patient teacher had almost despaired of ever making her see the light. She had drawn a frieze of noses in her copy book instead of writing, "Procrastination is the thief of time," twenty times, which was the light punishment that had been meted out to her for inattention. Some of the noses were her own, and others were more turned down. All of them seemed to her to be tragic.

"Maybe one can suffer with a turned-up nose after all," she mused.

She was sure of it later on when she had to stay in half an hour after school to work off her demerits.

She had had her painting framed, and was anxiously awaiting the hour when she would present it to her father.

"They'll recognize it! I know they will!" she said over and over to herself.

"But suppose they don't! Suppose I haven't been thinking about the right mother all the time! Maybe I haven't caught the likeness of the mother I have been dreaming of."

Peter, too, was going through agonies. Almost was he persuaded to break his word to Esther and warn his friend and old Mammy of the coming crisis.

"I'd do it if I could be sure she wouldn't find it out — No, I wouldn't. The poor child has had her very existence based on a necessary lie, but that one lie must be all." He groaned miserably to himself as he rang the bell at the old Grant house.

An air of festivity pervaded the place. Delicious odors of the forthcoming supper had found their way to the front hall when Esther threw open the door in answer to his summons. Bowing low in mock ceremony, she took his hand in hers and conducted him to the library where Dr. Wallace awaited their guest.

"I have put a lovely frame on it, and the hole I almost rubbed into it doesn't show a bit, now it is mounted," she whispered as she danced by his side.

"Good!"

“ Oh, Peter, only s'pose! ”

Peter looked mutely at his little friend. If he could only help her!

Everything was in readiness for the feast, but first the presents must be opened. Peter had brought a blue locket set with a star of tiny pearls, and a thin gold chain from which to hang it.

“ Esther means star, you know, ” he said.

“ Yes, Peter dear, I do know, and I think it is just like you to get something that means something. And the tea roses, too! Do you know, Peter, I used to think maybe I was born out of a tea rose like Thumbelina. When I was quite a little child, I mean. Of course, when I got older I knew I had a mother and was born like other babies, but tea roses are the loveliest roses in the world to me, and I think it must be because I used to think that way about them. You see, you have always sent them on my birthday, and I have always felt they were my birth flower, somehow. ”

“ Er — er — exactly! ” Peter was satisfied. He felt that one person understood him, but being understood made him desire with greater intensity that his little friend should be also.

Esther received her present from her father, a tiny wrist watch. Her eyes filled with tears.

Why, she didn't know. Was there ever such a dear, generous father in all the world? The watch was indeed beautiful, but she would have given it up and all the presents besides, even the blue locket studded with pearls, all, everything she prized on earth, if only that dear, generous father would hold her close in his arms and talk to her about her mother.

There were various other presents from her friends and a silk patchwork couch-quilt from Mammy. The old woman had done it at night and at odd moments while Esther was at school.

"Oh, Mammy, how beautiful! And with your poor eyes! You should not have done it!"

"Well, 'tain't but half size, an' I been a savin' them pieces fer quite a spell ter work inter that sunrise pattern. 'Tis mos'ly made er yo' paw's kervats an' yo' har'ribbons," said the old woman, proudly viewing her gift. "I made it light weight jes' ter th'ow over yo' foots whin you lay down ter take a lil res'."

"Yes, Mammy, and I thank you a million times. I love every stitch you put in it."

And now she must give her present to the doctor. She hung back embarrassed and not like herself. Mammy looked at her keenly. What was the matter with her pet? She had not been herself all day. Something was troub-



ling the child. Mr. Peter looked excited, too. He seemed to be trying to attract Mammy's attention. That is, he looked at her intently and bit his lips ferociously. Once he shook his head.

"My white folks is up ter something," Mammy muttered to herself.

Usually Esther took the old woman into her confidence concerning the present that she gave her father on her birthday. This year she had not done so. Why? Keen-witted old Mammy was busy thinking. It was high time for her to repair to the kitchen and take up supper, but wild horses could not tear her away, nor even the possibility of Sally Lunn overbaking, until Esther had given her present to the doctor.

"Here, Daddy! I painted it for you — and — and I hope you will — will — make allowances."

She handed the picture to the doctor, tied up in its neat tissue paper wrappings.

"My dear, I am certain to like it if you did it. Before I even see it, I assure you that I won't have to make allowances."

He undid the paper and placed the framed picture on the mantelpiece where all could get a good light on it. The mounting and glass mercifully hid the places where much rubbing



had almost worn through. The shiny gilt frame tempered the somewhat exaggerated yellow of the hair. On the whole it was certainly a very remarkable painting for a child of twelve to have made.

“Lovely! Charming! My darling Esther, I am delighted!” exclaimed Dr. Wallace. “It looks like you, too, which makes it just so much lovelier.”

Peter did not groan, but he nearly did so. He looked appealingly at Mammy. Mammy caught his eye and then looked at Esther. The girl's mouth was trembling. Her expression was touchingly forlorn. Suddenly the light broke in on the old woman's brain. She clapped her hands delightedly.

“Lawsamussy, Doc Andy, if it ain't a pixsher er Miss Elizabeth!”

Dr. Wallace gasped! Surely, Mammy had gone crazy.

The good man had been startled and distressed when he had seen his little girl evidently on the verge of tears when he praised the painting. What the cause was, he could not divine, but he saw her mouth tremble and her brown eyes ready to run over. He thought she must be sick — perhaps she was about to come down with one of the many children's diseases she

had up to that time miraculously escaped.

"Sho it's Miss Elizabeth! Look at that long goldin hair an' them eyes jes' lak Esther's 'ceptin' they's blue! I don't see how you done it, chil', wif a lil water an' them patty pans er paint."

At Mammy's discovery, Esther's whole expression had changed. Now her eyes were dancing again. The tears were falling, but they had no more sorrow in them than an April shower because she was smiling at the same time. She laughed with glee and threw her arms around Mammy's neck.

She had dreamed true! She had dreamed true! Mammy had recognized her picture whether her father had or not! As she buried her face on Mammy's faithful bosom, Peter gave Dr. Wallace a ferocious dig in his ribs.

"Of course! Of course! I had not got a good light on it. It is exactly like her! Splendid! Splendid! Remarkable!" he managed to jerk out.

Then Esther flew to his arms. He had at last mentioned her mother to her. She was sure that in all the world there was never such a happy child as she. Not only had she dreamed true, but she had been able to put her dream on paper.

If the two men had not been so busy watching Esther, they would have found food for study in the countenance of the old colored woman. In it they might have found a mingling of tenderness and triumph. Her ancient eyes, that had begun to be somewhat dimmed, were shining, and her bent shoulders straightened up like a girl's. She held her head erect and her whole figure suggested power. One might have felt that the noble blood of the African king that her great-grandmother had told her ran in her veins was asserting itself. By her powerful will she had certainly made her master say that he saw the likeness to his fictitious wife in the little water-color painting.

## Chapter 9

### ESTHER MEETS A FAIRY PRINCE

“Don't forget, Daddy!”

“Forget what?”

“Oh, you have already forgotten! Can't you remember that you promised to go to the Carleys for supper this evening? They are counting on it. Marian says they have ordered ice cream from Nunnally's and are going to have a spread. Mr. Carley is just crazy about you, Daddy, and it will break his heart if you don't go.” Esther had perched herself on the arm of her father's chair, and busied herself smoothing his hair and rumpling his collar.

“Nonsense! Carley is a good soul, but I can't see that I am called upon to spend an evening with him. It is much pleasanter at home. Besides I may get called out. Old Mrs. White is very ill. But, of course, if I promised, I promised.”

It fretted Dr. Wallace whenever he had to spend an evening away from home. It was so pleasant there, with Esther hurrying through her lessons so she could talk to him while she

put in her time sketching. Sometimes it was noses that claimed her interest; again, eyes and ears. Lately she had been doing hands in all positions. Mammy's hands she loved to draw, declaring they were like beautiful old apple trees all gnarled and twisted from bearing fruit. She would tell the old woman that she could get into Heaven without any recommendation from the Recording Angel. All she would have to do would be to show Peter her hands and he could tell by them how good she had been on earth. Sometimes she would hold up her own left hand as a model.

Often Peter Roche would drop in, and perhaps Marian Carley and other of her young friends. The doctor enjoyed these girls in spite of their sex. It never seemed to enter his shy consciousness that they were females. They were simply the friends of his daughter — nothing but children. Had he realized that they were beginning to think of themselves as grown-ups, no doubt his shyness would have gotten the better of him.

“Doc Andy is lak the man what done lifted a calf ev'y day 'til it got ter be a cow, an' he ain't a noticed that it done growed up. Miss Esther an' her frien's is fifteen or tharabouts an' they ain't chilluns no mo', but Doc Andy,



he ain't a thinkin' 'bout 'em as nothin' but babies."

On the day Esther was fifteen Mammy had begun to call her Miss Esther, although the girl protested vigorously, declaring she could never be "Miss" to Mammy, but Mammy insisted that it was right and held to her determination.

"I ain't a-sayin but sometimes in the privacy of retiracy that I won't slip up an' fergit, but 'fo' folks I's gonter gib you yo' full name an' clature."

Esther and her friends were not the only ones who were growing older. Dr. Wallace was forty-five and Mammy was somewhere between seventy and seventy-five, as nearly as she could calculate.

"I wa' a woman growed whin Marse Jeb Stuart come announcin' ter Marse Bob Wallace that the onlies' way ter git shet er the Yankees wa' ter whup 'em. Looks lak it didn't wuck somehow, 'cause we sho ain't shet er 'em yit. Howsomever, that wa' a long time ergo an' I mus be a-gittin ol' — nigh 'bout sebenty-five. I's spry yit, though, pow'ful spry."

And so she was, but the straight old back was bent now, and the proudly-set head had fallen somewhat between the shoulders, which were no

longer erect. Her keen black eyes were growing dim. Cataracts were forming over them. She fought off weakness and old age with the determination that was part of her forceful character. When her master suggested that she get someone to help her with the housework, she refused indignantly.

“ I ain’t a gonter hab no young free-niggers loafin’ ’roun’ here a eatin’ up yo’ victuals an’ settin’ up ter be as good as Miss Esther. They’s a lot er wuck lef’ in me yit. ’Cose, if you is got ary complaint ter make — ”

“ Now, now, Mammy, you know it isn’t that! ” he would say miserably. “ I just want to save you. ”

“ Well, whin I need savin’ it’s time ter bury me, an’ savin’ won’t do no good. ” And thus the conversation would end.

Dr. Wallace wished he could resist the all-too-evident feeling of getting old with some of the spirit his old servant evinced. There was no denying the fact that his hair was rapidly greying, and his waist line showed a decided increase. His dapper, clean-cut figure was losing its youthful lines. He did not like it at all, but he could not deny it.

“ Doc Andy done took on a middle-aged spread, an’ I done took on a ol’ age shrink, ”

Mammy would say as she neatly inserted a wedge-shaped patch in the waist-band of her master's underwear. "I's allus a-lettin him out an' takin' myse'f in."

Dr. Wallace's shyness had not decreased as his waist-band increased. The dread of women, which had possessed him as a young man, still held him in thrall. A woman must be ill for him to feel at ease with her. This the Carleys could not understand. They were constantly asking him to come to parties and dinners and suppers, and Mrs. Carley seemed to feel it a duty she owed to society to find a suitable person for their beloved family physician to marry. Whenever Dr. Wallace had been inveigled into accepting one of her invitations, she usually managed to have some young woman on hand who she had decided would be exactly the right person.

"Esther would be much better off with a step-mother," she declared for at least the hundredth time in the fifteen years of her acquaintance with the Wallaces. Indeed, a hundred is a low estimate. For five years, at least, it had been almost a daily remark and at times an hourly one when the subject was uppermost in her mind.

"I don't see why you say that. I never have

seen why you should say it," contended Mr. Carley. "Do you think Marian would be better off with a step-mother?"

"That is different. Marian has a mother of her own."

"But I mean in case —"

"Now, Mr. Carley, you are very rude even to suggest such a terrible thing. I just know I won't be cold before you will be looking around for another wife!" sniffed Mrs. Carley.

"Why shouldn't I as well as Wallace?"

"But that is different," she reiterated. "Mrs. Wallace has been dead fifteen years."

"Yes, and fifteen years ago you began trying to marry off Wallace to all the females of your acquaintance. I hope this evening you have not asked any woman to make him miserable."

"Well, not to make him miserable but to help entertain him — I have asked Mrs. Richards and her daughter Lucile."

"Who on earth are they?"

"If you ever listened when I talked, you would know! Mrs. Richards is a charming woman who has lately come into our church. She is a widow —"

"Ah, I thought so!"

"Poor, but so deserving, and very pretty, and quite a lady!"



“I have always noticed when a person is spoken of as ‘quite a lady,’ she is usually not quite one,” teased the husband. “Poor Wallace!”

“Poor, indeed! Mrs. Richards would make him an excellent wife. She has brought up her own daughter so well that she would be sure to make Esther a good step-mother, too.”

“In my opinion Esther has been very well brought up. She has excellent manners — quite as good as Marian’s — better in fact. Nobody would ever think of saying Esther was ‘quite a lady.’ It goes without saying where Esther is concerned. Blood will tell.”

Nothing irritated Mrs. Carley so much as her husband’s frequent affirmations that blood would tell. What it would tell was not quite clear in her mind, but she was sure that the fluid that flowed in her veins, if put to the test, would not show up as blue as could be wished. She enjoyed greatly the wealth that had come to her husband through the anti-kink lotion, but she resented bitterly the channel through which the wealth came. She also resented her husband’s constant reference to his successful business. Sometimes she even resented the name of Carley. It was so like “curly,” she was sure ill-bred persons made jokes about it.



## Esther Meets a Fairy Prince 103

“Daddy,” said Esther as she and her father approached the Carleys’ mansion, “Every time I come here I am glad we live where we live instead of somewhere else. The Carleys live in such a shiny house. It hurts my eyes. Even their flower beds are too shiny with geraniums and scarlet sage. And no sooner do you get used to the flowers than a florist comes and grubs them all up and puts something else there. The Carleys are foreverlastingly changing things — cooks and wall-paper and flowers and friends. Of course they always stick to us, but they are so terribly fond of us and we are fond of them, too. I’m not foolish over Mrs. Carley, but I really think she means well in spite of her silly ways. Sometimes I wonder if Mr. Carley doesn’t wish the cook would stay and Mrs. Carley would go.”

The doctor laughed as he expressed hearty agreement with Esther.

“She is kind, though, honey, you must never forget that. I reckon poor Carley has to remember it pretty often.”

“That is the worst thing about her — her kindness. It makes one like her, even when she is being the biggest kind of a goose. Now Mr. Carley is a perfect duck. I reckon that is where Marian gets her duckiness. If it had

been left to her mother she might have been hatched out nothing but a goose. Sometimes I think maybe Marian isn't Mrs. Carley's own child. She isn't a mite like her. She might be a changeling. The fairies might have come in the night and carried off the little goose and put a duck in its place. Or maybe she is a foundling. She may have been left on the Carleys' doorstep."

"Tut, tut!" exclaimed the doctor in a tone almost angry. "You mustn't say such things!"

"I'm not saying. I'm just surmising," laughed Esther.

Dr. Wallace pinched her cheek and rang the Carleys' bell. The door was opened by a brand new butler who ushered them into the drawing-room which had recently been changed from a blue room to a yellow room. The furniture was either new or had been re-upholstered, and the pictures were so changed about that Esther was almost sure she was in the wrong house until Marian came running in to greet her.

"Dr. Wallace, Father says please come back to his den. He simply hates this new paper. He says it swears at everything in the room, so he feels at liberty to swear at it. What do you think of it, Esther?"

"Well, I just got used to the blue and

## Esther Meets a Fairy Prince 105

felt kind of at home with it," admitted Esther rather hesitantly.

"Same here! And oh, Esther, darling, Mother has gone and invited some more people to supper. Father and I are furious, but we don't say so to Mother. Of course, she did not know how much I wanted to see you, and how much Father wanted to talk to Dr. Wallace alone."

"Of course not!" was Esther's polite rejoinder. "And I've been dying to see you, Marian—simply dying. I've got the most wonderful news! I've seen the prince!"

"What prince?"

"Why, *the* prince—the one in the stories!"

"Oh!"

"It was in the forest—not exactly the forest," she corrected herself as she noticed Marian's matter-of-fact astonishment, "but the little grove of trees in the corner of Fleet's lawn. Old Mrs. Fleet was ill and I had gone over there with Daddy in his car. While he was curing her I picked some daisies and climbed up in a mulberry tree to make a daisy chain. And while I was sitting there I got to thinking about the seven princes who were turned into seven swans, and the little princess who had to make seven shirts out of starry flowers so she could

break the spell on her brothers. You remember she couldn't crack a smile or say a word until they were finished?"

"I remember."

"And while I was sitting there making the chain, and thinking how hard it would be to weave a shirt, and wondering if the little princess had some spell that kept the star flowers fresh while she worked—all of a sudden he came!"

"Who came?"

"Why, the prince! He was walking along the lane that runs by the for—the little grove of trees, and he was whistling, not a loud, shrill whistle, but very soft and low, and then he began to sing:

'I want no kingdom where thou art, love,  
I need no throne to make me blest  
While I have thee, sweetheart, beside me,  
While I gaze in your dear eyes.'

I think that is the way it went but I am not quite sure. I almost fell out of the tree I thrilled so. I was awfully afraid he was going to look up in the tree and see me, but I wanted him to just the same. Marian, he is the handsomest prince you ever saw!"



## Esther Meets a Fairy Prince 107

“That isn’t saying much as I never saw a single one in all my life. But did he? Did he look up?”

“Yes, he looked up and then stopped singing and bowed low—like this. He had on a Panama hat, but I give you my word, Marian, he took it off exactly as though it had sweeping plumes.

“‘Fair maid,’ said he, ‘I am lost in the—forest. Will you please tell me which road to take to find the castle, or rather the—country club?’”

“What did you say?”

“Well, you see, I was pretending I was the princess who was making shirts for swans, so I said nothing and I tried hard not to smile. But I put my finger on my lips to let him know I was dumb. He looked so sad and sympathetic, and then he put his hand on top of the fence and vaulted over it just as easy as a circus actor. And he came right close up under the twisted mulberry tree. I was on the lower limb and his face was on a level with mine. He is a very tall prince. He took hold of one end of the daisy chain, and all of a sudden he stopped looking sympathetic and smiled and then he laughed and, oh, Marian, his teeth are good enough to be false! Then he bowed low again and said:



“ ‘Fair maid, I see that thou art making seven shirts of star flowers for seven swans, thy brothers. And the magic will work only if you neither speak nor smile while you sew the shirts. Far be it from me to break the spell. My kingdom is afar off. I am a king, at least a prince, and by the fineness of your golden hair, by the curve of your cheek and the beauty of your eyes I know that thou art a princess. But were you a begger maid I would still ask you to let me return some day and take you to my kingdom. Do not speak but merely bow your head.’ ”

“ And what did you do? ” Marian was getting excited.

“ Would you believe it, Marian Carley, I sneezed! The pollen from the daisies had got up my nose, and I sneezed so terribly that I almost fell out of the tree. I was terribly mortified,—the idea of doing such a thing at such a moment! ”

“ Did the prince laugh? ”

“ Not a bit of it! A true prince would not laugh at such a thing. He looked sad and sympathetic again, and lent me his handkerchief although I didn't need it. ”

“ How did he know you were just playing dumb? ”

“ I think maybe it was because I said ‘ Ouch! ’ ”

## Esther Meets a Fairy Prince 109

when a little briar I had picked with the daisies stuck in my finger."

"Do you reckon you'll ever see him again?"

"Of course! He is coming back for me after a year and a day. He said so."

Marian laughed. Sometimes her matter-of-factness was put to a severe strain by Esther's fancifulness.

Mrs. Carley's other guests arrived and the new butler announced supper. The hostess, seated at the head of her glittering table in the newly decorated dining-room, looked with satisfaction on the assemblage. There was nothing Mrs. Carley enjoyed so much as what she called "a gathering." The table was resplendent with burnished silver of the latest pattern, wherein the gorgeous floral decoration in the center of the board was reflected in a variety of hues and shapes. The china was just bought, — purchased, doubtless, because of its extreme newness in design and color. The newness of the table linen was proclaimed by its extreme stiffness. Seated near the hostess were Mrs. Richards and her daughter, Mrs. Carley's newest friends. The cook — a recent acquisition — was sure to put forth her best efforts, as is the way with cooks as well as with brooms. The butler was new and very alert and capable.

The only fly in the ointment was that the butler unmistakably had been applying to his own woolly head the lotion that made it possible for his mistress to indulge herself so freely in the matter of table and wall decorations. His kinky hair evidently had had a recent treatment, and was as straight as an Indian's. Each black hair stood on end trembling with outraged dignity as the man darted rapidly around the table, leaving a trail of strong scent in his wake.

"Doesn't he look like a ceiling brush?" Marian whispered to Esther, who wanted to giggle but caught Mrs. Richards's eye and thought better of it. His head certainly did look as though it had been intended for house-cleaning purposes.

Mrs. Richards and her daughter Lucile were certainly all that Mrs. Carley had claimed for them. They were a handsome pair, and both of them seemed quite willing to make themselves as agreeable as the occasion required. Mrs. Carley did all in her power to bring to Dr. Wallace's notice the general agreeability of the desirable widow, but Dr. Wallace turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to her machinations. As for Mrs. Richards, she seemed to divine that the physician was shy, and so she confined her attentions to his daughter.

## Esther Meets a Fairy Prince 111

Esther, with a perverseness for which she could not account, refused to respond to the advances of her fellow guest.

“I don't like her! I don't like her!” she said to herself. “Why, I don't know, but I just don't.”

Her feeling for Lucile was quite different. Marian and Esther, from their fifteen years, looked up with admiration at Lucile's eighteen, while that young woman, from her great age, viewed with amused tolerance the irrepressible giggles that occasionally assailed the younger girls; but with admirable restraint she concealed her condescension.

In Lucile Richards' handsome black eyes was an expression of mingled repression and ambition. The girl had had a hard life and it was mirrored in her eyes. Poverty and a hand-to-mouth existence had been the rule rather than the exception during her eighteen years, the last two of which had been spent as a pupil-teacher in a fashionable school in New York. Hers had been the task to coach the stupid, backward children of the rich, and for her labors she had received her board and tuition, a well-earned recompense. Girls bored Lucile, especially girls of fifteen. She resented deeply the care-free childhood and girlhood of most of

the girls of her acquaintance. Why should they have so much and she so little? Why should she have to make herself agreeable whether she felt like it or not? Others did not. It was plain to see that this doctor's daughter did not like her mother and made no effort to be pleasant to her. But she, Lucile Richards, must smile and smirk and be pleasant at all times. She longed intensely for the freedom to be as disagreeable as she chose: a strange ambition, perhaps, but one that naturally might have developed from a youth of forced smiles.



## Chapter 10

### BRANCHING OUT

To the disgust of Mrs. Carley, Mr. Carley was succeeding as usual in monopolizing Dr. Wallace. What was the use in asking suitable widows to meet her family physician if his attention was entirely engrossed by his host? By straining her ears she could catch bits of the conversation carried on by the two men. Some of it irritated her, but at some of it she smiled. This was what irritated her:

“See here, Wallace, you are not looking very fit!”

“Nor feeling fit either!”

“Now, old fellow, you know I am some straightener—made my fortune straightening things—am still making it—piling it up! Now, if I am such an adept at straightening wool, I wish you would let me make some suggestions to you concerning your affairs.”

Why should the man always be bringing in his anti-kink business? Mrs. Carley frowned and sniffed suspiciously as the butler bore down upon her bearing a dainty dish.

"Fire away!" laughed the doctor. "I need some advice."

"You work too hard."

"I know that, but what am I to do?"

"In the first place, you must get an assistant — some young and promising doctor who will be glad of the chance to hitch on to your coat-tails. Your practice warrants it."

"Yes, that's so."

Mrs. Carley smiled at this point. It might be very pleasant to have a nice young man in the immediate neighborhood. So convenient for Marian and Esther, now that they were growing up!

"Yes, you must have an assistant," Mr. Carley proceeded. "You must also have a chauffeur. Why, man, you waste half your strength attending to your car."

"Maybe so!"

"Also, you must have an office attendant. Why, man, you might be a country doctor in the dark ages for all the conveniences you have. What doctor of your practice do you know who puts up with a one-room office and nobody but an old darkey to answer the telephone? Branch out, man! Branch out!"

"I don't want to branch out," groaned the doctor. "I am quite content as I am."

“Nonsense! Nonsense!” exclaimed the energetic straightener of things. “If a practice will grow, it will grow, and nothing but death will stop it. The thing is to take care of its growth. When a boy begins to grow, keeping him in short pants isn’t going to keep him from growing. He’ll burst out of them, and the only decent thing to do is get him some big enough for him. Your practice has passed the short pants stage now, and it is up to you to clothe it properly. Think it over, man, think it over! First, an assistant; then, a chauffeur. Then build an extra room on your house if you haven’t space for another office; and then an office attendant to give tone to the place and see that the telephone is properly answered and your accounts kept, and so forth. I bet enough money is owed you this minute to pay for the new office and the attendant’s wages for a year, all because you haven’t sent out your bills.”

Dr. Wallace looked sheepish. He was slow in getting out his bills. There was no denying it.

“Another thing, you need exercise — golf, tennis, walking, anything to keep you young. I’m ten years older than you are, and no one would believe it to look at us. Why is it? Because I don’t try to run my business by my-

self. I get good men under me and pay them to do the work."

Mrs. Carley could hardly attend to her guests, so busy was she trying to catch all that her husband was saying to her physician.

She was sure she knew exactly the right chauffeur for the doctor and could send him an office attendant who would fill the bill perfectly. There was nothing that that good lady liked better than to manage other persons' affairs, and now a wonderful opportunity was presenting itself.

When Dr. Wallace reached home he called Mammy and Esther to him and told them what his neighbor had said to him.

"It is the truth," he sighed. "I am getting old, and actually find myself falling asleep in my chair. I don't like it at all. Maybe if I got some help, I could find time for golf or something, and it might help some. I wish Carley had let me alone, though. I was getting on well enough before he put such notions in my head."

"Lawsamussy, Doc Andy, don't git ter talkin' that er way. 'Taint never too late ter patch things up. When folks git ter resentin' bein' 'sturbed, they 'minds me er a ol' man I knowed onct what wa'n't perzactly crazy but he

had loose notions. He useter git it in his haid he wa' a settin' goose, an' ev'y time anybody tried ter stir him up he'd hiss. Don't take ter hissins', Doc Andy, don't do it!"

And so it was decided that Dr. Wallace was to procure an assistant in the shape of a young doctor. And since Mammy refused to have help from her own race, a young woman must be found to look after the office; also, a chauffeur was to be hired, and an addition built to the old house to make more office room.

Esther resented bitterly the additions to the household and the house.

"A new office stuck on to our nice old house will ruin the effect, and it will never be the same," she wailed. "Before you know it, we will be looking exactly like the Carleys. And what do we want with a horrid young doctor with a pimply forehead and button shoes lolling around in our house? As for an office girl, why can't I stop school and attend to things? I can draw and paint all the time when the phone isn't ringing or I am making out bills and things. The patients who have to wait would make grand models. I bet anything the girl you get will be calling up beaux on the phone just when people are being born or dying or something and trying to get our number. I am sure she



will chew gum and stick it in little wads under the desk. The only thing about all these changes that I like is having a chauffeur. I sha'n't like the assistant. I just know it!"

Dr. Wallace laughed.

"Suppose I promise that my assistant, whoever he may be, shall not have a pimply forehead, and that I'll be particular about his footgear, although that does not seem so very important to me."

"But you don't know, Daddy, dear, how terrible it is for your assistant to wear button shoes. It isn't done."

"Ah, I see."

"I know you are overworked, but wouldn't it be better just to see the very ill and dying and let the half-sick persons get some other doctor?"

"Yes, but Esther, my practice would soon go at that rate. If all of my patients died there wouldn't be any left."

"But you might take little new-born baby cases, too, and let your practice grow that way. I know it's the people who pretend to be sick that wear you out. Now, isn't it?"

"Perhaps! But sometimes those persons who pretend to be ill really do get ill, so a physician can't afford to slight them."

"I reckon I'll have to put up with an assist-

ant then, Daddy, but please, please, get one who can be the prince if we need him in our plays. Marian simply refuses to wear tights any more."

"What are the requisites for a prince?"

"Shapely legs, or rather limbs — I reckon a prince's legs are limbs — and I think a dimple in his chin would be nice."

"Well, I'll do my best. Now, how about the office girl?"

"Oh, Daddy, please let me be her!"

"Nonsense, child! You are only fifteen and must go to school at least four years more."

"Well, if I must submit, I must, but please, Daddy, don't get a girl who wears beads all the time, and don't let her say Ma'am to me, and don't let her have watery eyes, and don't let her fall in love with the prince. She won't have to live here like the assistant, will she?"

"No, oh, no! That would be too hard on us and our circle."

Dr. Wallace had made a name for himself in his profession, and when it was known that he wanted an assistant, an embarrassment of riches was poured on him — worthy young doctors recently graduated from the medical college, and hospital internes who had just completed their period of training. So many

applied it was difficult to choose. All of them seemed such happy, hopeful youths, so ready and willing to have a share in his practice that he was truly sorry not to take every one of them. Remembering Esther's stipulation that the assistant's legs must be shapely so he might take the part of the prince, he found himself scanning the nether ends of the applicants with such diligence that he was sure they would think he was as embarrassed with young men as he was with young women.

The underpinning belonging to Jim Dudley, a strapping young Kentuckian, claimed his attention. No doubt they would look well in tights, could he be persuaded to don them—laced shoes, too! But, of course, something besides mere legs was necessary if he was to trust the young man with a share of his practice. He glanced tentatively at the young doctor's countenance. It was quite as pleasing as the legs. A good forehead, no pimples, clear grey eyes, well-set and intelligent, an aristocratic nose, a humorous mouth which laughed easily and disclosed sound even teeth, and, Heaven be praised, a firm square chin that was saved from aggressiveness by a slight cleft!

"I fancy it was a dimple when he was a kid," Dr. Wallace said to himself. "I think this one

will do. He is so good-looking I can sick him on the female hypochondriacs, thereby saving myself a world of trouble and embarrassment."

Had young Dr. James Dudley known that his legs and chin had been instrumental in obtaining for him the enviable position of assistant to the much-sought-after Dr. Wallace, he would have been so enraged and humiliated that he would have employed those said legs to carry him out of the community as fast as they could.

Jim Dudley had never given more than a passing thought to his good looks. Of course he knew he was over six feet, and that his legs and back were straight, and he was glad of it, in that such things had made him eligible for various athletic sports at college. He also knew that the fair sex looked kindly on him. And why shouldn't they? He certainly looked very kindly on them. His manner with all women was perfect. Old ladies adored him, and young ones blushed and dimpled at his approach. Had he known that he was thought to be somewhat flirtatious, the knowledge would have been as much of a mortification as the knowledge of Dr. Wallace's reasons for choosing him as an assistant. But, truth to tell, his kindly attention to women was too general to put him in the



category of a flirt. He was as attentive to the grandmothers as to the granddaughters.

At the age of twenty-five he was more engrossed in his chosen profession than in all the women in the world. He had ranked well in his class at the University. After graduation he had spent a year in a hospital in New York and then a year in London, and now he had come back to his own country to settle down and make the name for himself that he felt sure of. His outlook was certainly encouraging: well-born, well-educated, happy in his profession, anxious to serve, and now his big opportunity had come to him almost immediately after he had decided in which city to settle. He was also singularly blessed, in that his family was rich and he had ample means so that he was not dependent on the whims of hypochondriacs for a living.

It was rather hard on the other applicants, whose limbs were not so shapely and whose chins not so pleasing, that the young man who was already so well endowed with the world's goods should have been chosen by Dr. Wallace. However, Jim Dudley was as much of a favorite with men as with women, and, strange to say, nobody seemed to bear him ill will for being so favored of Fortune.



He was rather nonplussed when he found out that the assistant was supposed to take up his abode with his chief. He had not bargained for that, and much preferred to have an apartment of his own in the neighborhood. Dr. Wallace, on the other hand, took it for granted that his assistant must be impecunious, as is generally the case with young doctors, and assumed that he would want to reduce his living expenses as much as possible. He had looked into Dr. Dudley's record at the University, and had seen his diploma from London, but the young man's private affairs were of no importance to him and he never thought to inquire into them. He was a gentleman, no doubt of that, clean-living and courteous, and fit to come into his home.

Dr. Wallace still considered his Esther a little child, and the thought never entered his head that he was lacking in prudence in the least in bringing this amazingly handsome young man into his home. Esther had stipulated that his legs must be fit for a prince, and so they were; that his chin must sport a dimple, and behold a cleft, which was a near dimple!

## Chapter 11

### DOCTOR JIM DUDLEY

Esther helped Mammy arrange the assistant's room. Helping Mammy usually meant getting in her way and talking to her. The old woman, like most capable persons, did not know how to be helped, but lately she often asked Esther to do little things for her, which the girl gladly did.

"I's still strong an' well, but my eyesight ain't so good as it wa' in the fus' beginning. Now, chil', you jes' peek aroun' an' see ifn I's lef any dirt a-stickin' ter this here departmen'. Doc Dudley seems ter be a moughty tidy young man, an' I don't want him ter come here an' fin' us a-wallowin in filth."

"It's as clean as clean can be, Mammy, but here's a floor-rag under the bed and a dust-pan on the table."

"Great Gawd! Jes' s'pose he done come an' catched us alls with sech things a-goin on! Here, chil', gib 'em ter me! I'll have ter count my breshes an' rags an' sich ter see I ain't lef none er them, jes' lak Doc Andy say they have ter do whin they operate 'case one time a

spurgeon done sewed up his spetickles in a man's innards. Now, Miss Esther, please git a clean scarf for the booreau, an' don't you think a lil posey in a vase on the table would be kinder frien'ly lak?"

"Why, yes, but there are no flowers in bloom yet but violets and I haven't time to pick a bunch of them."

"You mought spare him one of Mr. Peter's roses. They's as fraish as they wa' on yo' buth-day, 'cause I done kep' 'em clipped an' changed the water constant."

"I reckon Peter wouldn't mind," and Esther ran off to get a rose from the big birthday bunch, which was still holding its own after more than a week.

"There!" she said as she put the little glass vase on the table. "He ought to be right pleased when he sees what a nice room we have fixed up for him. Mammy, I'm awfully sorry he is so old. I kind of hoped Daddy was going to get a right young man. He is really too old to play the prince. Twenty-five is lots too old."

"Is you saw him yit?"

"No, but Daddy told me he was about twenty-five. Why, Mammy, by the time I am twenty-five I'll be an old maid, or maybe married. Of course, he will do to play the prince

if we paint all the deep lines out of his face."

"Why, chil', twenty-five ain't ter say Merthumselah."

"No, but it is quite middle-aged. I reckon I'll have to be real respectful to him."

Mammy's faded eyes twinkled.

"I reckon you will."

Dr. James Dudley was pleasantly surprised by his new quarters. He was installed about an hour before supper on an evening in late March. It was a very blustering evening, with dashes of rain. His trunk had been delivered earlier in the day; also, a varied collection of hat boxes, bags and suit cases. These were piled up in his room. Mammy grumbled a bit over the quantity of luggage.

"Anybody'd think he wa' the Prince er Wale wif all these bags an' baggages. I hope he ain't got no skelingtons a hid in them trunks. I reckon it ain't been so long since he wa' a student, an' I don't trus' students til they's been doctors long ernough ter larn how ter 'have. When I sees a passel er medicine students, all er them a-trying how tough they kin be, I wonders wha' they goes when they gradumates an' wha' the 'spectable doctors comes from."

The old Grant house was never more attractive than when, in Mammy's phrase, "it wa' weatherin' outside." There was an air of hospitality and cheer in its very lines. Mammy believed in blazing fires, especially when company was coming, and Dr. Dudley was to be company for the first night at least.

When he arrived, it was a little early for lamps, but the soft coal grates were blazing merrily away. From the front porch he could see into the library, and before he rang the bell he could not resist peeping into the fire-lit room.

Esther was seated on the hearth rug hugging her knees and gazing in the fire with a wrapt expression. She loved to sit that way and dream before the lamps were lit.

"I wonder how old she is. I wonder what she is thinking about. Whatever it is, I should not be rubbering in the window this way," and the young man stopped his musings and gave a sharp ring at the bell.

Esther jumped up from the hearth and beat a hasty retreat. The coming of a stranger into the household was very disquieting to the girl. She hated the thought of having someone around all the time. No matter how nice an old gentleman a doctor of twenty-five might prove to be, he was nevertheless a stranger and an intruder



in their home circle. He must be a fussy old gentleman besides, or he would not have so many bags and hat boxes and what not. It was a great bore to be dignified and wear her company manners all the time, and she was sure that that would be exacted of her now that this stranger had come among them. No more sitting on the floor and dreaming; no more sliding down the banisters; no more having breakfast in the kitchen on dark mornings when the fire in the dining-room had a way of smoking and she and her father would plead with Mammy to let them eat their buckwheat cakes there; no more would Mammy serve them on the batter-cake turner directly from the stove without the formality of useless cake plates. The kitchen had always seemed cheerful and bright, even when the sun did not shine. All that sweet homey life was over now. Mammy would not think it at all meet to have a strange gentleman eating breakfast in the kitchen.

She wished she had been able to help her father pick out an assistant. She was sure it had not been done well, in spite of the fact that her suggestions concerning legs and chins had been complied with, also button shoes. That must be the new doctor at the door, and she did not like his manner of ringing the bell at all.

What business had he coming to their house like a telegram? She was sorry she had put one of her birthday roses in his room. They were Peter's roses, anyhow. Perhaps Peter would not like her giving one away. If she had time now, she would run up and take it out of the guest chamber which she and Mammy had prepared so carefully for this person who was so intent on breaking up their happy home. If Mammy would only think it was the telephone ringing and not the front door bell and answer the former, then she would have time to slip up stairs and get her rose back; but the ringing of the bell had been so sharp and peremptory that for once the old woman made no mistake and hastened to the door.

Esther had to confess that his voice sounded quite pleasant as he spoke to Mammy, apologizing for giving such a sharp ring.

"I was thinking of something else and pressed the button harder than I meant to. I hope you will excuse me." Esther, from her refuge under the stairs, heard him vouchsafe this explanation to Mammy in such a friendly tone that she was sure the old woman was won over.

"Láwd, sir, I don't make no mind fer that. Wait a minute an' I'll call Miss Esther to show

you yo' room. Miss Esther! Aw, Miss Esther!" But Esther hid behind her father's great coat on the rack under the stairs and refused to harken to the old woman's voice.

"Whar that chil'? She wa' here no mo'n a minute ago. Esther, baby, aw, Miss Esther! Nebber min', I'll show you up, sir."

Mammy had spied an ominous moving under the great coat, and realized that, for some reason, her child was hiding and was opposed to showing the gentleman up. The old woman had the truly maternal instinct of concealing from the world at large any faults that might develop in her baby. She would no more have let the young man know that her Miss Esther was misbehaving and treating him rudely than a real mother would have done.

In her heart, the wily Mammy had already begun her plans for a happy marriage for her darling, and who so appropriate as this young doctor if he should prove to be all that her master had reported him to be? Esther must marry and marry happily. Once this was brought about, if the fact of her namelessness should be disclosed, it would not make much difference. Fifteen was not so very young to begin planning.

This was the very day, fifteen years ago, that

the mysterious bundle had been left on their door-step. It was a lucky day for them, and this stranger arriving on the same day was perhaps a good omen. This flashed through Mammy's mind as she courteously showed the young man up to his room. If only her baby would behave herself and present her most charming side to the young doctor! Mammy would not admit even to herself that all of Esther's sides were not charming, but she felt that perhaps some moods might be a little more desirable than others. It was a bad beginning — refusing to come when she was called and hiding behind the overcoat. If she had only managed to conceal herself more completely it would not have been so bad, but her slender legs and little slippered feet had been in plain view, and then she had wiggled at the wrong moment. Mammy was almost certain the guest had seen the hat-rack shaking in a manner most reprehensible for hat-racks. He may even have glimpsed the black legs that did not in the least resemble the mahogany ones belonging to that piece of furniture, and one would be blind indeed who confused the claw feet of the hat-rack with the shiny patent leather pumps worn by Esther.

Mammy was sure that the bad beginning was



due to have a worse ending when Esther failed to appear on time at the supper table. The flustered girl had suddenly decided to become grown up, and had raced off to her room as soon as the unwelcome guest was safely shut up in his chamber. Locking her door, Esther had unbraided her hair and with trembling fingers coiled it on top of her head. Her hair was the kind of hair that arranged itself almost without effort, being full of unexpected waves and curls like a mountain stream. There was no smoothing it. If confined at one point, it found its way out in ripples at another. Looking at her image critically from all angles, Esther could not but be pleased with the effect.

Now she could appear as Lady Disdain before this person who had come into their home. She would sail in to supper late, holding herself with great dignity. She could wish her skirts had been a little longer. It was difficult to be dignified in skirts that just covered one's knees.

"Let me see! How much of a hem have I?" she mused, critically examining the skirt of the soft brown crêpe-de-chine dress she had donned for supper.

"A good six inches! That will help a lot." With quick snips of the little silver scissors she ripped the hem and shook it out.



“Mercy! I didn’t know six inches would make so much difference. I’ve pretty near got a train,” she exclaimed, joyfully. “I reckon the horrid creature won’t notice that there is a raw edge at the bottom of my skirt. I’ll face it when I get time.” Wherewith she began to pace back and forth in front of the mirror practicing a dignified tread.

“I must turn in my neck. All ladies should wear low-necked gowns to supper.” With the aid of pins, she lowered the round neck of her dress to the proper décolleté line.

The supper bell had sounded, but she felt her entrance would be much more effective if she was a little late. She would make this person understand that she did not hurry for him.

## Chapter 12

### A FRIEND IN NEED

There was one thing Mammy would not brook in her family of white folks, and that was lateness to meals.

“Victuals what is meant ter be hot gits col’, an’ victuals what is meant ter be col’ gits hot. If Doc Andy is off ’tendin’ ter the sick an’ sufferin’, that is diffunt, but whin folks ain’t got nothin’ ter do but come eat I can’t see no needcessity whe’fo’ they mus’ loit.”

On this evening, when Jim Dudley was installed as assistant to Dr. Wallace, Peter Roche was having supper with them, too. Peter always came on the anniversary of his god-child’s advent into the Wallace household. He seemed to drop in quite casually, and quite casually Mammy always had what she called a “partified supper.” By careful clipping and attention, the birthday roses were still fresh enough to give a gala air to the table, and by skillfully adding an extra dish or so to the menu Mammy would bring the meal beyond the standard of a “plain home supper.”

Jim Dudley was glad his lines had fallen in such pleasant places. He liked Dr. Wallace from the start—liked him as a man and respected him as a physician. He liked the comfortable air of the house, and above all he liked the kindly old servant who had opened the door for him and ushered him up to his pretty room with its antique furniture and oval rag rugs. What a kindly old person she was, so anxious for his comfort and so pleased when he complimented his room! Her faded eyes had gleamed with satisfaction when he leant over and smelt the one beautiful rose in the vase on his table.

“What a wonderful rose! Might I wear it in my button-hole?”

“Sho, you kin!” declared Mammy, ‘delightedly.

“What is your name, Aunty?” inquired the young man in an interested tone.

“I’m jes’ Mammy. I goes by the name of ‘Ria Johnson, but I comes by jes’ Mammy. Supper’ll be ready in three shakes.”

There was a mysterious transference of something from Jim’s hand to Mammy’s horny palm, but so quickly and adroitly was it accomplished that had the room been full of eyes, they could hardly have seen what was going on. This established the young doctor in the good books

of the old woman. Not the fact that he tipped her — but his manner in so doing.

“A ge'man, a bawn ge'man! He don't let his lef' han' see what his right han's a-doin, let alone all the neighbors and fambly,” she chuckled to herself as she dished up the supper.

The three gentlemen responded to the supper bell with alacrity. When Peter and Jim were introduced, the older man had looked at the younger with a searching gaze that might have put him out of countenance had he not been at peace with the world. Jim Dudley had nothing that he could remember to be ashamed of, so why should not stern middle-aged lawyers look at him as though he were in the witness box if it gave them any pleasure? He returned the gaze without flinching. A mischievous instinct almost caused him to wink at Peter as the penetrating eyes of the lawyer looked down into his very soul, but a certain sincerity, almost solemnity, of intentness in the older man's expression kept Jim from this frivolous demonstration of light-hearted youth.

Peter dropped his eyes finally. Evidently, what he saw deep down in the soul of Jim Dudley pleased him. In leaving the fresh beauty of the young man's face his gaze fell on the tea-rose worn so debonairly in his button-

hole. He turned away abruptly, his face and neck suffused with crimson.

Tea roses always made Peter think of Esther, and to see a gay handsome young man wearing one of these roses in his button-hole with such nonchalance was more than the sensitive Peter could bear.

"A fool! Nothing but an old fool!" he took himself to task. "The man hasn't even seen Esther yet, more than likely, and here I am fancying things!"

And so, when the supper bell sounded, the three men responded with alacrity. Jim felt that in some way he had displeased the gentleman whom he designated in his mind as "the apoplectic old cove," and their host had a notion that his friends were not getting along quite so well as he might wish. Supper would loosen up things somewhat, and Esther would be sure to make everybody happy and comfortable.

"Where is Esther, Mammy?"

"She comin', Doc Andy, she comin'!"

Dr. Wallace understood very well from her eager tone that he was being put off. Evidently Mammy did not know whether Esther was coming or not.

The guests were seated, and Mammy uncovered the tempting dishes.



"Jes' holp yo'selves," she begged in her most hospitable voice. "I'll leave you, Doc Andy, ter do yo' own rechin' an' go see whar Miss Esther is."

"All right, Mammy, we'll do our best," laughed her master.

"Esther, chil! Miss Esther, baby!" she called up the stairs.

"Coming, Mammy!" came after a moment's delay.

The old woman went back in the room with happy assurance written on her old face. Her baby was not going to misbehave on this important occasion. A squeaking swish was heard in the hall. That meant Esther was expediting matters and making up for lost time by sliding down the banisters. Perhaps she was not going to be as lady-like as Mammy would have her appear at this meeting with the handsome young stranger. If only the child could know how important it was, this first impression!

The hall door opened slowly and Esther literally sailed into the room. Her little head with the grown-up chignon was carried high with queenly hauteur. Six inches on the end of her short skirt had brought it down to her ankles.

Mammy gasped. Peter's mouth, opened to

receive a fried oyster, remained opened, the oyster balanced on his fork. Dr. Wallace looked anxiously from his daughter to Mammy. What were the women folks up to?

Jim Dudley, with the rare intuition that endeared him to the sex supposed to have a corner on intuitions, grasped the situation in a moment. For some reason, this child was pretending to be grown-up. Far be it from him, Jim Dudley, not to humor her. He, too, had gone through the fairy story period and had formed a picture, when a boy, of a beautiful princess with hair like the sunshine. Here she was!

“My daughter, Esther, Dr. Dudley,” faltered poor Dr. Wallace.

Esther made a low curtsy, not the little jerky kind taught to children, but a deep slow sinking kind used in the minuet. She had practiced it for court scenes in the fairy-tale plays, and had mastered the art of coming down very gracefully, sitting on one foot for two beats of the music and then gradually getting up. Certainly, getting down gracefully was much easier than rising, but she was sure she could do both. However, she had not made allowance for the six extra inches on her skirt. The soft clinging material wrapped itself around her foot and when two beats were up she could not budge.

On her entrance Jim had sprung from his seat, and as his host introduced him to his daughter, he had gone forward, not in the least embarrassed by the girl's theatrical advance and curtsy, although she did not deign to look at him. He, too, as a youth, had danced the minuet and acted in private theatricals, but whether he had or not, Jim Dudley's social graces would have stood him in good stead when there was a problem of conduct to be faced. No powdered, bewigged courtier in velvet cloak and plumed hat could have made a lower bow. With hand on heart he bent over as gracefully as any prince in any fairy tale.

It was a little awkward when his fair partner stayed down so long. The cavalier is supposed to bow until the lady gets through. He agreed with Mammy that hot food should not be allowed to get cold nor cold food hot, but no matter how much he longed to get back to the good supper which he had left to enter into the spirit of the game with this child, etiquette forbade his straightening up until the lady finished curtsyng.

"My foot — caught —" she whispered in a tone meant for him alone.

He took her by the hand.

"Arise, princess!" With a strong pull he

helped her up, and with an adroit kick she loosened the imprisoned foot.

As she regained her footing she looked for the first time at the young physician.

“The prince!” she gasped.

“Hast thou finished the seven shirts of star flowers?” he asked, taking her by the hand and leading her to her seat. No waiter on a Mississippi steamboat could have pulled back a chair with a more elegant air than did Jim Dudley. His eyes were full of laughter, but he kept a sober countenance until Esther herself burst into a hearty ringing laugh.

“Not yet — and oh, the poor swans! I have broken my vow of silence and they can never be free.”

“Well, please don’t begin all over.”

“Just think that you are him!”

“He!” corrected Dr. Wallace. The old physician had observed the tableau, but he did not in the least understand what Esther and his assistant were talking about. But whatever it was, there was no use in saying “him” for “he.” Esther was always play-acting, and if the young doctor, brought into the household to make it possible for him to play golf, wanted to play-act with her, why, so much the better. He could be a good doctor and of great assist-



ance, even if the daughter of the house did choose to call him prince.

It was settled. Jim and Esther were friends. From the moment he put out his strong hand and helped her disentangle her imprisoned foot she knew she was going to like him—even before she knew he was the prince of the twisted mulberry tree. Had he saved her life, she could not have been more grateful. To drown in the ocean could not be any more terrible than the humiliation of the position from which she had just been rescued, especially as she had meant to be so grown-up and dignified. Even Peter was ready to laugh at her, and Mammy showed plainly that she highly disapproved of such carryings on. As for her father, she well knew he would have teased her unmercifully had things not turned out as well as they did.

“Hungry, daughter?” he asked, looking at her with ill-concealed admiration.

“Starved!”

She forgot all about being grown up.

What a merry time they had at that supper! Peter stopped glaring at the rose in Jim Dudley's button-hole, and listened with interest to that young man's account of life in London. Esther's advent seemed to have put all three



men at their ease. Child of fifteen though she was, she had a rare social gift—the gift of making people comfortable and happy. Sometimes Dr. Wallace would remember what Mammy had said when the baby was left on his doorstep—about its being a mascot—and he wondered if it could be true. Would good luck always follow in her footsteps? Would it be good luck for her as well as the persons with whom she dwelt?

Mammy went in and out from kitchen to dining-room, and had the ones at the table looked at her, they would have seen a touch of elation in her bearing.

“I couldn’t er planned it better,” she muttered when she was out of earshot.

“You wa’ scairt ter death,” put in her alter ego of the querulous tones.

“Scairt! ’Co’se I wa’ scairt. But he is took wif the chil’ an’ she is done los’ her grudge ’gainst him. Whin she come a-prancin in, lookin’ lak her clo’s wa’ a comin’ off, I ’lowed she done broke her ’lasses pitcher then an’ thar, but I wa’ mistook. I wa’ mistook. Mascots don’t nebber break they ’lasses pitchers plum in two. They drops ’em an’ pretty nigh busses ’em, but they manages ter keep from crackin’ ’em open somehow. Gawd be praised!”

“Well, I’m edified ter hear you praisin’ Gawd. Looked ter me lak you wa’ a-praisin a ol’ nigger woman I knows.”

“Sho! Sho! So I wa’, but it is the good Gawd,” was her cheerful rejoinder as she turned out a mold of hot Sally Lunn and carried it triumphantly to the table.

## Chapter 13

### THE TOO-PERFECT ATTENDANT

Mammy was certainly growing cantankerous. The stream of young girls who were employed by Dr. Wallace to look after his office bore witness to the fact. They stayed such a short time, either because they did not suit Mammy or Mammy did not suit them, that the poor doctor never could remember the name of the incumbent.

"Call theyselves keepin' keer of the office! Huh! If sweepin' dirt under the rugs an' jes' slappin' the furnisher with a dirty rag is keepin' keer, they do it, an' that's 'bout all they do do. I been allus a-thinkin nigger gals wa' no 'count but they ain't a patchin' on white gals."

"Well, what can you suggest?" asked Dr. Wallace, wearily. "How about getting a colored boy? He could help you and look after the office telephone, too, and as for the accounts, Dr. Dudley and I can attend to them."

"Lawd love us, Doc Andy, don't git no lazy, triflin' male nigger boy here. My eyes is pretty near give out as they is, an' if I got ter be

a-spyin arfter a nigger boy, they won't be no seein' lef' in 'em 'tall. If you want ter know what I thinks 'bout office help, I'll tell yer."

"I do want to know." Doctor Wallace had infinite patience with the old woman. He well knew that her crossness and nervousness were caused by the condition of her eyes. The cataracts were developing, and nothing makes one more nervous than being unable to see. He hoped that the time was near when he could have an operation performed on her eyes, and then he felt sure she would be herself again. In the meantime, he must bear with her peculiarities. He was more than willing to employ any help necessary. In fact, he begged her to let him get a cook and housemaid to look after the arduous duties, letting her superintend the housekeeping, but she would not hear of it.

"Not so long as I kin crope aroun' an' feel the dirt if I cyarn't see it," she said. "I knows how ter cook in the dark an' 'twon't be long now 'fo' these canteracks will be ripe fer pullin'. It does look hard that they done attackt my good eye, too — the one I been all time a-seein' with. This here lef' eye ain't never been ter say much. 'Cose, I kin look with it but I ain't never been able ter see much with it. The right

one's allus been doin' the work an' now it's done got inter trouble.

"Now, speakin' of office help, Doc Andy, if you listen ter me I'll tell you what is the malefaction in yo' 'rangements. You is been a-gittin gals what ain't had no raisin' ter speak of. They thinks they is too good ter sile they han's, an' still they ain't got since enough in their haid's ter make a livin' wif 'em. You know, that las' one what call herse'f Immerjean Maud couldn't hardly write down the names er yo' patients, but was allus a polishin' up her nails an' greasin' up her mouf wif that there pink tallow an' hel' herse'f ter be too good ter dus' off the mantel. All she wanted ter do was fix herse'f up ter catch Doc Dudley. All of 'em is been arfter him, tooth an' toe nail."

Doctor Wallace smiled. It was plain to all beholders that the many office girls who had come and gone were of one mind concerning the handsome young Kentuckian. He seemed to be the only one unconscious of the fact that they might have neglected their duties. They never neglected him.

Mammy had observed this and sternly disapproved of their various wiles. She had a secret fear that one of them might catch the young physician, and she had made other plans



for him. She watched with delight the growing friendship between Esther and him.

"No beau lovin'—jes' plain gib an' take likin'," she would say to herself. "The bes' foundation fer matermony."

But should one of these wretched office girls catch his affections before her baby had reached a suitable age for the desirable young man, the old woman felt she would never forgive herself. At any moment a designing wretch might turn up who would snatch the prize from under the very nose of her darling. Mammy had hit on a solution for this difficulty.

"Whe'fo', Doc Andy, you don't stop tryin' ter git a gal an' git a growed-up 'ooman what is got since enough in her haid ter use her han's? That's what me and Mrs. Carley thinks. Th' ain't ter say much wuck ter do in the office, bein' as I sees that it gits a tho'eh cleanin' onct a week, an' the res' of the time jes' a lil goin' over wif a rag is all that is 'quired an' that ain't needcessitatin' much stren'th. I reckon they is many a pleasant-faced lady what is seen better days who wouldn't min' a-settin thar wif her tattin' an' answerin' the phome an' makin' out the bills. If'n she is a sho nuf lady she'll jes' nachelly keep things tidy. Mrs. Carley say she knows one."

“Perhaps you are right, Mammy. I’ll see what can be done.”

Dr. Dudley’s coming had relieved the older man somewhat, but the practice was growing steadily and now both men were kept busy. An office assistant was quite necessary to them. The young girls who had been selected from among those who had answered the newspaper advertisement did not prove any more satisfactory to them than they did to Mammy. Perhaps an older woman would be just the thing.

He determined to consult Mrs. Carley, to that lady’s huge delight.

“Indeed, I do know the very person! You know her, too — met her in this very house. Don’t you remember Mrs. Richards? Such a pleasant person, with a handsome daughter named Lucile! Lucile is off in New York teaching at *such* a fashionable school. She is quite a clever girl, *so* industrious and satisfactory. Her mother is very proud of her daughter, and well she might be. Mrs. Richards is a widow and *so* deserving. She does *such* beautiful needlework — I am sure she would be the very person you want.”

Dr. Wallace could not see how needlework would help him, but he was willing to take Mrs. Carley’s word for it that Mrs. Richards

was the person of all others to fill with credit the position of office attendant to himself and Dr. Dudley.

“Surely you must remember her, Dr. Wallace. She was here the evening Mr. Carley persuaded you to get an assistant, a chauffeur and an office attendant. She was *quite* impressed by Esther. Raved over her, in fact. I thought at the time that Mrs. Richards would be the very person to take charge of your office, but she had a position at the time, so I did not mention it. I remember I suggested a chauffeur to you — Mike. I do hope he is satisfactory.”

“Perfectly so, madam! All of us like Mike. And now, if you will see this lady and offer her the place I shall be more than grateful. I am sorry I can't remember her, but then — ”

“Ah, yes, I know, Dr. Wallace, you pay very little attention to well women. I'll see her immediately.”

Mrs. Richards accepted with alacrity and in short order was installed as office attendant. She was a handsome woman of about forty. There was a nun-like simplicity about her neat, perfectly-fitting gowns. Her manner was quiet, with a certain poise and dignity. She did little talking but attended assiduously to her duties.

The office was spotless; the accounts were kept with perfect accuracy; the telephone was answered courteously, and information was given in a thoroughly business-like way. Mrs. Richard's manner to her employer left nothing to be desired. She divined his feelings in regard to women and his embarrassment in their presence, and was careful to efface herself as much as possible. She never addressed him unless she had some business to discuss with him, and then she approached him with quiet dignity and modesty. When she was not occupied with office work she embroidered exquisite tiny flowers on baby caps. She had a standing order with some great department store for all of these little caps that she could make.

Mrs. Richard's coming certainly made life much easier for Dr. Wallace. He found himself relying on her more and more. She was as regular as clockwork, neat and orderly, and seemed to understand his needs without receiving special instructions. Jim Dudley liked her. Mammy had no fault to find with her. Only Esther had an unaccountable distrust of this office assistant. She could not tell why it was, but from the beginning the girl had a feeling almost of fear of this calm, quiet, lady-like woman, who had only courteous words for everybody ;



and whose one desire seemed to be to please the household and do her duty.

"She looks like she is waiting for something," Esther said to herself, — "kind of like a grey snake coiled up in the grass ready to strike. I know I'm a beast to think so when everybody else is crazy about her. I know she is wonderful for Daddy and makes life easier for him. I know Jim thinks she is just bully, because he said so. I know Mammy has no fault to find with her — I know the Carleys like her, especially Mr. Carley — but — but — I don't like her voice — I don't like her eyes — I don't like the way she holds the baby caps when she sticks the needle in and out. She never thinks about the little baby that is going to wear the cap. I believe she would not at all mind sticking the needle in the baby. There is something in her eye that tells me so. All she thinks about is the money she will make on the cap. She hates me, too! I know it by the way she looks at me with her eyebrows raised and her nose a bit pinched in. She tries not to show it, but I can tell. I reckon she hates me because her own daughter, Lucile, has to teach for her tuition. I'm glad I'm not Lucile. I'd rather have my own dear, dead mother, with her warm, sweet heart, loving everybody the way Mammy



said she did, than a mother like Mrs. Richards with her efficient ways and her cold heart that would just as soon stick needles in babies' heads as in their caps. I bet if Mammy could see as well as she used to, she wouldn't like her either. I am almost sure Mammy doesn't like her voice. I can tell it by the way she cocks her head on one side when Mrs. Richards is speaking. I know I am bad to feel this way. I know I should try to like her, but somehow I don't want to like her. I am as bad not to like her as she is not to like me, and I am just like her because I don't want anybody to know how much I hate her. And now Daddy is going to have her take dinner with us every day because he is so kind and good and wants to save her the trouble and the money. I can't bear to think of having her around all the time. She is so creepy and so mousy. I know she is pretty and her clothes fit mighty well. I know she is a poor widow who has worked and slaved to give her daughter all sorts of advantages. I know she is deserving of all praise, but I just don't like her, and I'd rather have our nice old house to ourselves. She breaks up our home. That's sure, and nobody seems to know it but me. I don't see how Mammy and Jim can like her the way they do. Of course, Daddy doesn't

care about her one way or the other. He just finds she saves him trouble. Sometimes, I think maybe Mammy is just pretending to like her, because she is the one who advised Daddy to get a grown-up person for the office and stop trying girls. Of course, Mammy likes to be right, and if she didn't like Mrs. Richards, that would prove she was wrong. If there is anything I hate, it is a person whom you just naturally dislike but who never gives you any reason for hating her. The more I dislike Mrs. Richards, the more perfect she is. If only I can be polite to her always and never let her know how I feel!"

Esther had many such communings with herself. Sometimes she took herself to task severely for her dislike of the inoffensive Mrs. Richards; at other times she encouraged the feeling by finding excuses for her unreasonable hatred. She never entered the office if she knew Mrs. Richards was there, although, before that lady's advent into the household, the girl had preferred that room to any one in the house and had spent many hours curled up on the old leather couch, reading and dreaming of fairy lore. Dr. Wallace had liked to have her there, but he had grown so busy that he did not seem to notice her absence.

At dinner, the one meal that Mrs. Richards took with them, Esther was always very quiet. She sometimes made a point of coming late, but this annoyed Mammy so much that she could not do it often. At all other times she was full of life and spirits, talking and laughing, joking with her father and Jim, teasing Mammy, bubbling over with fun and happiness — as gay as a bobolink. The sedate young lady who appeared at dinner was a contrast to the little hoyden who charmed them at breakfast and supper.

If Mrs. Richards knew of the effect she had on her employer's daughter, she said nothing about it. The girl was always scrupulously polite, but she seldom addressed a remark to the older woman, and if she did, it was always couched in the most formal language.

"Whe'fo' you don't cotton ter Mis' Richards, honey chil'?" Mammy asked one day when Esther got in late to dinner and begged Mammy to let her have that meal in the kitchen.

"What makes you ask that, Mammy? Don't I behave well to her?"

"Sho, yo' 'haves too well. You is that prissy an' proudified whin you is fo'ced ter talk ter her that you 'minds me er playin' lady-come-ter-see wif the preacher's wife."

"Do you like her, Mammy?" Esther left the kitchen table, where she had finished her dinner, and perched herself on Mammy's lap. Big girl that she was, every now and then she got in the old woman's lap. Those were moments of infinite bliss to Mammy. She held the girl close in her arms, and went over in her mind the precious babyhood of her loved one. "Cross-your-heart-and-hope-you-may-die, Mammy, do you really and truly like Mrs. Richards?"

"Well, now —"

"Cross your heart and then cross my heart — now!"

"You see —"

"No, I don't see. Do you like her looks?"

"Well, honey baby, I ain't able ter see mo'n jes' a kinder blur wha folkses' faces is — both my eyes is actin' up — but that blur is tollable putty."

"Poor Mammy! Never mind, soon that will be all right. Well, I'll tell you how she looks. She is pretty, with a good nose, and a mouth that is good enough, except she keeps it shut too tight. Her hair is nice and smooth and well brushed; and her teeth are even and well brushed, too, I guess; and her dress is good and also well brushed; and her shoes are small



and neat. But, Mammy, you can hear better than anybody I know of, so tell me this — and cross your heart again, Mammy — do you like her voice?”

“Well, I don’t ter say admire it much. It’s a business-lak voice, an’ I reckon she kin make them phome centrals stan’ aroun’ whin she jaws ’em, but I ain’t ter say keerin’ much ’bout her talkin’ voice. Seems ter me lak I done hearn a voice lak it onct a long time ergo, but I cyarn’t spot it. She don’t never talk loud wif it, but sometimes it looks ter me lak she’s got a bridle on it a-holding it in.”

“Exactly! And that is just what I don’t like about her. She is too unnatural. Mammy, I have felt so bad about being the only one who doesn’t like her, and now I feel so much better. You are with me.”

“But, chil’, I never said sich a thing.”

“No, but you implied as much.”

“I never ’plied nothin’! Here, git off my lap an’ let me wash up them dishes. You ain’t a gonter make me c’mit myself.”

“You don’t have to, you old precious! Don’t you know that I know you? Do you like Jim?”

“Who, Doc Dudley? Sho I likes him. He’s the salt er the yearth.”



"See! When you like anybody, you come out with it and don't hem and haw. I caught you up, Mammy!"

"But, chil', she is sho a he'p ter yo' paw an' Doc Jim Dudley. That there ought ter make us lak her some."

"I know that, Mammy, but the more she helps them the less I like her. That's just how bad I am, Mammy, and you are just like me. But, Mammy, we are going to be as good as gold and not say a word about it. I'll be polite, but I won't love her. I don't want to love her, and I'm glad she doesn't like me."

"Whe'fo' you say that?"

"Because she doesn't. I can tell. Does she like you?"

"Lawd, chil', I ain't nothin' but a ol' nigger 'ooman, an' it ain't no min' ter nobody whether she laks me or not, but she ain't got no cause ter treat you ugly."

"Why, Mammy, she treats me beautifully. She is as lovely to me as I am to her. That's what I hate about it. I'd rather she would turn up her nose at me. Then I could bite my thumb at her instead of pretending all the time. Does she treat you well?"

"She sho is! She is very politeful ter me, but I don't never have no words wif her one

way or tother. I kinder think she ain't much of a nigger-lover, but s'long as I does my wuck an' she does hern I reckon we'll git along. Whin I gits these canteracks cut off'n my eyes, I'll tell you what I thinks 'bout her looks — not that looks makes so much diffunce whin I laks folks. What does Mr. Peter think about her? Does he lak her?"

"I don't know. Peter is so dumb, there is never a chance of getting anything out of him. Of course he doesn't see her often because she is gone when he comes to call in the evening. I reckon he likes her well enough. Jim thinks she is fine, and, I believe, wishes I'd be more like her. I'll see myself!"

## Chapter 14

### A MONOLOGUE ON LOVE

When a young doctor is blessed with comeliness and charm and an exquisitely deferential manner with all women old and young, no matter how much he may be in love with his profession, society will claim him for its own. Jim Dudley was besieged by society. There was no escaping it. If he got by the daughters, the mammas nabbed him. Fathers, sons and brothers joined forces with their womenkind. If he had not possessed a character in which level-headedness was united with innate modesty, the young man would certainly have been ruined by the adulation he received from the four hundred of that southern city in which he was now a rising figure.

Always having been sought after more or less, Jim Dudley looked upon his social successes with calm indifference. He accepted invitations when it suited him, but declined them, when he chose, with perfect nonchalance. He rarely consented to dine away from home, frankly preferring the jolly little suppers with

his senior partner and Esther. Mammy always cooked well, but on those suppers she seemed to outdo herself.

“I ain’t a been caterin’ ter men-folks all my life fer nothin’. I knows what they likes an’ whin they likes it. Men folks ain’t a gonger take ter eatin’ away from home lessen they is unsatisfied,” she remarked to herself one evening when she had heard Dr. Dudley refuse an invitation to dinner at the country club. “Thank Gawd, I had bakin an’ fried apples ternight. Doc Dudley sho is partiam ter bakin an’ fried apples.”

“You air scairt Doc Dudley will fall in love wif one er them sassiety gals,” scoffed the voice that fell into a querulous note.

“No sich a thing! They air too many er them fer him ter settle on one. His heart air fixed on my chil’. How does I know it? I knows it by the way he pass her the taters — I knows it by the way he ax her fer mo’ sugar in his coffee whin she already done put in two lumps.”

“You knows a lot fer a ign’rant ol’ nigger!” in scoffing tone.

“Yes, I knows a lot! Book larnin’ ain’t ev’rything. I knows Doc Jim Dudley air sick an’ tired er all these here white gals an’ they

maws a-phomin an' writin ter him. 'Come Monday!' " she mimicked. "'Gagement? Too bad! Thin make it Chewsdays! 'Nother 'gagement? Wednesday'll do,' an' so on til Kingdom Come. 'Cose, it air all good fer business in a way, but Doc Jim Dudley ain't stuck on that a way er gittin' custom. They is gals an' growed women, too, in this here town what is so took up wif Doc Jim Dudley that if he 'nounced he wa' a gonter gib up gin'ral practice an' take ter curin' nothin' but the seben years' itch, they would come a-scratchin."

"Oh, go long, nigger!"

"Now, my Esther baby, she don't lower herse'f none ter him nor nobody else. She air lak one er these here water lilies what close its petals up whin things gits too hot fer it. All the time, though, her heart am pu' gol', pu' gol' jes lak a water lily."

Three years had passed since Jim Dudley's lace shoes had combined with his unblemished forehead and cleft chin to place him as assistant to the popular Dr. Wallace. The partnership had been a pleasant and profitable one. The friendship between the two men had grown strong and sincere. With Esther, Jim took the big-brother attitude somewhat, although at times he was acutely conscious that it was a



false attitude. He had sisters of his own, and knew very well that his feeling for them was not quite the same as the one he had for Esther. To be sure, they were older than he, but even had they been younger he was certain he would not have had quite the tenderness for them that he had for his little friend. Never would he have thought of them as fairy princesses.

Esther was no longer a child. The men of the household did not realize it, but Mammy understood and resented bitterly the failing eyesight that kept her from enjoying the increasing beauty that she was sure must shine from her darling's countenance.

Beauty did shine therefrom, beauty and charm and sweetness. She was not a whit spoiled by the fact that the girls of her set all adored her. Nor did she lose any of her unaffected girlishness because of the many callow youths who came ringing Dr. Wallace's doorbell on the evenings of the week when school did not hold and girls of her age were permitted visitors. Dr. Dudley did not approve at all of these boy beaux who buzzed around his little princess.

"You are entirely too young for such foolishness," he declared one Friday night when the last caller had reluctantly departed.

"What foolishness?" asked Esther, yawning prodigiously as she helped Mammy bring in the porch cushions. Mammy always sat up until her baby was safely tucked in bed.

"Why, the idea of that ridiculous little boy's making love to you! That's 'what foolishness.'"

"Do you mean Willie? What an old goose you are, Jim! Why, Willie wasn't making love to me — he was just talking love. Willie has no idea what love is. Of course he will learn, but while he is learning, he will have to talk a lot about it. It does him good, and it doesn't hurt me a bit. If it annoyed you so, why did you hang around?"

"Because I think you are too young not to have a — a — chaperon."

Esther laughed joyously, and Mammy gave a little chuckle as she closed the green parlor blinds and discreetly betook herself to the kitchen.

"I wouldn't call you a chaperon, Jim. How would dragon do — a dragon of propriety? Do you go along as chaperon on all those parties you get invited to? No wonder you are in such demand."

Jim grinned and determined to accept no more invitations for non-school evenings.

“ You say Willie doesn't know what love is — do you know? ”

“ I think I do. ”

Esther had started up the steps, but she leaned over the banisters, her face on a level with the young man's. They both thought of the first time they had met by the twisted mulberry tree.

“ You see, Jim, there are all kinds of love. There is the kind of love I have for my father, which is just part of me. Of course I love my father and of course he loves me. Sometimes when I am loving him the most I tease him a little just to make up and have him hug me. Then there is the kind of love I have for Mammy. That is a kind of selfish love, I am afraid, because Mammy does so much more for me than I do for her. I reckon Mammy knows more about real love than any of us, because her love is all expressed in doing things for people. Do you know, Jim, I believe Mammy would even commit a crime for her white folks, even if she thought she would be eternally damned for it. Willie, poor boy, thinks that sitting on the front steps in the moonlight with some girl is love, but he will learn better. ”

Somewhat ill at ease, Jim listened patiently to Esther's naïve discourse.

“And what other kinds of love are there?” he said at last.

“There is the kind I have for my mother, which somehow has always been the realest thing of all, although I never saw her — not even a picture of her. But I know a lot about her. Mammy told me all she could remember, and I know how she looked because one time I made a portrait of her that Mammy and Daddy both recognized. My love for my mother is a kind of religion to me,” she said softly.

“Then there is Peter, dear old Peter. To say you love Peter is kind of like saying you love bread and butter. He is substantial, just like bread and butter. You can't do without him, and would find out how much you loved him only if he were taken away from you — just as you'd miss bread and butter if you had to have caramel cake for breakfast. Then there is Marian and all the girls. Of course, some of them are caramel-cakish and you wouldn't want a steady diet of them. Then there is Mike, dear Mike! Who could help loving him?

“Then there is another big love that takes in everybody and everything — the lame dogs on the street and the sick cat in the alley, the dirty-faced little children and the poor sad



women, and the poor bad men, and the flowers, even the weeds, and the bugs and beasts, the sunshine and the rain, everything and everybody — at least, most everybody. Of course, there are some people you just can't love."

"And where do I come in?" He covered her little hand with his as it rested on the railing. "It seems to me you have mentioned everybody of your acquaintance but me. Am I merely in the general scheme of things? Am I in the miscellaneous list along with the alley cats?"

"Oh, no, Jim! You are a fabulous monster, a dragon, and have a list all to yourself."

She slipped her hand from under his and ran lightly up the stairs. He stood for a moment clinging to the banister as though her hand were still prisoned in his. He sighed audibly as he mounted the steps to his room.

Mammy emerged from the dining-room, where her sharp ears had caught most of the conversation between Jim and her young charge. She locked the front door, turned out the light, and then felt her way along the hall to the back stairs. As she ascended to her room she chuckled delightedly.

"Doc Jim Dudley, you air got ter be nimble come trimble ter ketch up wif my Esther baby."



## Chapter 15

### FINDING A NAMESAKE

Upper Garden Street was quite different from lower Garden Street — different both topographically and socially. In the upper stretches of the street, many a stately mansion reared its head. There lived what Mammy proudly called “the nablehood.” The old Grant house had at one time been the handsomest place on the block, and in point of architecture and front yard, it still was nothing to be ashamed of. But newer and finer homes had been built on all sides, which flaunted their newness and grandeur in the faces of the passers-by. The old house bore the look of a sweet Quaker lady in an assemblage of overdressed dames.

Upper Garden Street gave a sudden dip and a quirk to the right, narrowed itself, and behold, Lower Garden Street! The houses took a tumble quite as precipitous as the street. No more mansions were visible, hardly a two-story house — nothing but cottages, at first neat and prosperous, but gradually getting shabbier and

more unkempt as the street approached the river.

Within a hundred feet of the river this changeable street did another wonderful thing. Again it took a turn to the right, quite a sharp turn, and without a note of warning it suddenly transformed itself into a pleasant country road that ran along with the river, evidently having forgotten all about its former grandeur as well as its slovenly degradation.

This was Esther's favorite walk and sketching field. The river always had had a fascination for her. She loved the lower street, too, with its swarming population of dirty children, some wistful, some saucy. She wondered why they stayed in the crowded, narrow street when God's green country was just beyond and free for the taking. Why would they content themselves with playing in the gutters, sailing their boats in soapy, greasy water — one of the by-products of wash day, on the street — when only a little way down the pleasant, shady road was a sweet, little brook that flowed into the river. In spite of the charms of the shady road beyond the second turn, she, too, would often linger in the lower street and watch the children at play, making hasty sketches of them.

"The country is lovely," she said to herself,

"but after all, nothing is so wonderful as 'just people.'"

It was a rare and radiant day in June. The gutters in the lower street were full to overflowing with delectable, soapy water. The suds sparkled in the sunshine as they foamed from a waste pipe. Surely, all the women in the street were washing on that day to make such beautiful soapsuds. School was out for the year, and the children were noisily happy as they waded in the gutters.

Esther, too, was glad that school was out. Commencement day had come and gone. Dressed in white, she had stood on the stage with her class, and had stepped from the ranks to receive her diploma. She was much more conscious of having graduated in white organdy than mathematics, but nevertheless she prized the sheepskin that bore witness to the fact that she had gone to school for twelve long years. Now she meant to give her life up to sketching. The time might come when she would be allowed to go to New York and study art, but in the meantime, there was the lower street and the river to be studied and sketched, and Miss Hunter's studio, where she passed many happy hours.

Jim Dudley had given her a beautiful gradu-

ating present — a complete little sketching kit. She had taken it out for the first time, intending to christen it with a thumb-nail sketch for Jim. It was great fun watching the kiddies sail their boats in the gutters, but the river was calling her and she must run along and get busy with her sketch. Soon she left the road and entered a little overgrown path leading directly to the river. She and Jim had followed that path one day and had enjoyed a little picnic down by the bank. She had determined then to make a picture of the spot — a bit of curved sandy beach in the foreground, and, on beyond, an arched stone bridge. Softly she walked along the tangled path, stopping now and again to listen to the birds who seemed filled with the joy of living. June is the month for singing, and they were getting in all the music possible before the heat of July. She caught the note of a thrush; then a wren; then a whistle she could not identify until a streak of scarlet cut across her vision, and she knew the strange note was that of a Kentucky Cardinal. Suddenly Mr. Mockingbird took up the combined refrain of all the birds and scornfully flung it back at them. Abashed for a moment, the more modest singers were silent, but one by one they came back in the chorus.



Esther held her breath in ecstasy. A tiny Molly Cotton Tail came loping up the path, and a striped chipmunk scuttled behind a huge sycamore tree.

"It's wonderfully good to be alive!" she mused. "But what is that bird? Could it be a dove? They are melancholy enough."

She stopped and listened intently. There was a moan that might have been a dove's sad song, but an unmistakable sob followed.

"Somebody is miserable! And on such a day, too!"

The sobbing continued, and then she heard a woman's voice:

"My baby! My baby! How can I? But I must. It is the only way. I can't leave you and I can't stay here any longer. God forgive me!"

Esther pushed her way through the tangled vines and alder-bushes that bordered the little river. Crouched on the bit of curved sandy beach which she had planned to use as a foreground in her composition was a young girl no older than Esther herself. Clasped in her arms was a tiny baby. Every line of the girl's slender figure denoted complete abandonment to misery and woe.

"Oh, what is the matter?" cried Esther.



"Please let me help you." She fell on her knees by the side of the girl. "What a darling baby! Let me hold it, please!"

At Esther's first words the girl started to clamber to her feet, but mention and praise of her baby arrested her action. She stared at Esther for a moment and then covered her face with one hand.

"Don't speak to me! Go away! I'm not doing any harm."

"Of course you are not! Neither am I. I just want to see your little baby. Is it yours?"

"Yes!"

"How lovely! Aren't you proud of such a wonderful little thing being yours?"

The girl uncovered her face and looked curiously at the person who had broken in so unexpectedly on what she had thought to be her last moments on earth. Then she looked down on the tiny form held so close in her arms, and a smile of infinite sweetness crossed her face. She was a pretty girl with great grey eyes and blue-black hair. In spite of a faded, brown calico dress several sizes too large for her, Esther's artistic eye could detect the subtle lines of beauty in her slender form.

"Proud of it! Everybody says I ought to be ashamed of it. That's why —"

"Ashamed of it! But you love it, don't you? Of course you do," noting the way the poor little mother curved her arm around the tiny creature. "You might be ashamed if you have been — been — immodest — but now that the baby is here, you have to be proud. Please let me hold it a moment. I'll give it right back." She held out her arms beseechingly.

"She ain't fit to be held by the likes of you. She's naked. I had nothing but this old rag to wrap her in. I pawned everything else."

Esther tried to keep the shocked look out of her face. She was fully aware of the fact that her timely entrance had kept the poor wretched girl from plunging into the river and taking her baby with her. One tactless act or word and she might still carry out her design. She was evidently desperate. Esther shuddered at the thought of the terrible destitution that the young mother must have faced.

"Well, there is nothing in the world sweeter than a little naked baby. I just love them. It is warm to-day, and babies don't need many clothes when the sun is shining so. How old is she?"

"Just a month."

At last Esther had the little creature in her arms, wrapped in its rag,

“What a precious! I feel like squeezing her real hard. What is her name?”

“She hasn’t any name. I just call her baby.”

“Oh, but she must have a name, mustn’t she?”

“I didn’t see the use.” The big grey eyes stared in the river.

“Oh, please name her for me. I have always just longed to have someone named after me. My name is Esther — Esther Wallace. Would you mind?”

“No — I —” the girl choked. “You don’t understand — I’m — I’m not fit, neither is the baby.”

“Not fit? This dear little angel not fit! Don’t say such things about my namesake and godchild — that is, if you will let me be her godmother. Please tell me your name.”

“Cora!”

“Now, Cora, let’s go home, and Mammy and I will find some clothes for little Esther. When I was a little girl I had a big doll baby I used to call the ‘Largest Doll,’ and she had a whole trunkful of clothes. She ended her days with a broken head, but I am sure her clothes are still there. They will just fit little Esther. Let me carry the baby and you carry my sketching things. They are not heavy.”

Meekly Cora picked up the sketching kit, and meekly she followed Esther up the path without once looking back at the river.

It was characteristic of Esther that she never once thought that anybody would act differently from the way she was doing or would criticise her for her behavior. Of course, it was unusual for a young lady living on Upper Garden Street to walk through the streets carrying a tiny baby wrapped up in a rag, with the mother of the infant trailing along dejectedly beside her, but then it was an unusual thing for a young lady to go out to make a sketch on a wonderful June morning and find her foreground occupied by a poor unfortunate girl about to jump in the river with her baby in her arms.

"Here's where I live," she said gently. "We'll go find Mammy, Cora."

The front door was always left unlatched during the day—a fact which saved Mammy many a step as Esther and her friends were constantly running in and out. Esther opened the door, and taking the poor girl by the hand, she lead her straight back to the kitchen where Mammy sat dozing over the shelling of a lapful of peas.

"Mammy, I need your help!"



“What is it, honey chil’?” Mammy awakened with a start.

“Mammy, I have a friend with me. Cora is her name, and her little baby hasn’t any clothes. I want you to find the clothes that used to be worn by the Largest Doll before she got a broken head. I am sure they would just fit the little baby, whose name is Esther Wallace. Look, Mammy, isn’t she precious? We met down by the river.”

Mammy’s keen intelligence grasped the situation quicker than her dim eyesight took in the fact that Esther’s arms held a baby wrapped in a faded piece of gingham.

“What you say? Wha’s any baby?”

Esther put the infant in the old woman’s lap, right on top of the unshelled peas.

“Gawd in Heaben!” gasped Mammy. “What you done did, Miss Esther? Whe’fo’ you done —”

“Now, Mammy, I’ll tell you all about it after we get the poor little baby dressed. Here, sit down here, Cora. I’ll hold the baby, Mammy, while you go look for the doll-clothes. You know where you put them, and they are all clean, too, because I remember how you did them up before you put them away. Now, hurry, Mammy! You are the best old Mammy



in the world, and I love you more than anybody, but please hurry!"

"Gawd in Heaben!" was all the darkey could say as she untied her apron, carefully holding the peas in it. "Gawd in Heaben!" She peered curiously at Cora as she left the kitchen on her way to the attic.

"Po' thing! Po' thing!" she muttered as she pulled a doll's trunk from under the eaves where it had been shoved years before.

"Po' thing nothin'! Low flung pusson, mo' likely!" came Mammy's second voice.

"I wouldn't be so mean an' despicious as you air fer a pretty."

"Well, you know Miss Esther ain't got no call ter be a trapsin th'ough the streets with no shanty boat critter lak that there gal downstairs. Met by the riber! Huh! I reckon they did meet by the riber. I reckon she would a dove in if Miss Esther hadn't a happen along in the nick er time. Good thing, too!"

"Nigger, you make me trimble fer yo' soul. You let Esther baby a kotch you voicin' sich utterances an' she won't be a-sayin no mo' that you air the bes' ol' Mammy in the worl' an' she lubs you better'n anybody. Po' critter! Po' critter! I cyarn't he'p a thinkin' 'bout po' Miss Elizabeth an' her long goldin hair. I

reckon I'll take all these here doll rags downstairs, trunk an' all."

From her seat, Cora gazed dumbly at Esther as she rocked the baby and crooned to it. The poor girl was almost glad she was still living. If only she had not had that strange gone feeling! She had been hungry often enough to know the symptoms, but this hunger was of a peculiar type—not just a gnawing but an infinite weariness as well. She looked at some green peas that had dropped from Mammy's apron to the floor and wondered if she mightn't pick one up and eat it. She leaned forward and then quietly crumpled up on the floor.

"Cora, Cora! What is the matter?" cried Esther. "Oh, she has fainted!"

She ran swiftly to the office, clutching the baby to her bosom.

"Mrs. Richards, is Daddy here? No? Well, where is Jim?"

Mrs. Richards was embroidering a baby cap. She was just completing a tiny forget-me-not, and Esther felt like screaming as the older woman carefully and deftly took the final stitch and bit off her thread before answering.

"Dr. Dudley has just come in. He went out to the garage for a moment," she said in the dead calm voice with the rasping edge that

Esther hated. "Can I be of any assistance?" She looked curiously at the bundle clasped in Esther's arms. "Is that a baby, Miss Wallace?" The white dents were around her nose. Esther also hated the white dents.

"Yes, but I must have Jim! Cora has fainted and Mammy is in the attic. Jim! Jim!" she called through the window that faced on the garage. "Quick, Jim! I need you."

Dr. Dudley came running at Esther's call.

"What is it, my dear?"

"Oh, Jim, a friend of mine in the kitchen has fainted and this is her baby, and its name is Esther Wallace. She was on the way to jumping in the river when I met her. The baby is so cute, and, oh, Jim, I am so sorry for her!" All of this poured out in an almost unintelligible flood as she ran back to the kitchen, the young doctor at her heels.

Mrs. Richards carefully stuck her needle in her needle-book, and then got up and followed them.

"Pick her up and take her up into my room, Jim. She is as light as a feather, I am sure."

"Yes, dear Esther, I know she is, but I think it would be better to put her on the couch in the office for the present."

Jim Dudley gently lifted the poor girl, who lay huddled in a little limp heap on the kitchen floor.

The proper treatment rendered by the young doctor soon opened the grey eyes.

"I think it is hunger, Esther," and Esther flew for soup which she was sure Mammy had in the big black pot on the back of the stove. The baby was tenderly laid in the big leather chair in the office. Not for worlds would Esther have asked Mrs. Richards to hold it while she went for food, nor would she ask that lady to go get the food. There was something about her manner that made Esther feel that she highly disapproved of the whole affair, and when she came back, bearing a cup of soup, and saw Mrs. Richards looking down at the baby as though it were a species of reptile, she was sure she hated the poor little creature.

The food had a wonderful effect on Cora. A faint color came into her wan cheeks, and her eyes brightened.

"Come on back ter the kitchen an' set up to the table an' I'll set out a sho' 'nough meal," insisted Mammy, who had come down from the attic bearing the tiny trunk.

Mammy picked up the baby and bore it off to the kitchen, Cora following. Mrs. Richards

went into the consulting room, leaving Esther and Dr. Dudley alone.

"Jim, you were lovely to poor Cora. I can't thank you enough for being so kind to her."

"How could I have been anything else? Poor little soul! Tell me all about how you happened to find her."

So Esther told the whole story.

"And, Jim, to think of her being ashamed of such a precious baby! But what are we to do now? She can't be turned adrift — besides, the baby is my namesake and godchild now."

Jim laughed.

"You didn't let any grass grow under your feet, did you, Esther? Of course she mustn't be turned adrift. We must find a home for her, and we must look after mother and child. Let me speak to Mike a minute. I fancy he can think of some place."

Mike could. In fact, his own mother, he was sure, would take Cora in — for the time being, at least. And now the baby must be fed — an operation which pleased Esther immensely.

"You must have lots of soup, Cora — not only for yourself, but so little Esther can grow strong and fat."

Then the doll-clothes must be tried on the unresisting infant. They fitted to a nicety.



Rarely did a little waif fall heir to such an outfit. The Largest Doll had been a great favorite in her day, and her wardrobe had been an extensive one.

"I'm so glad my poor doll was a baby. Wouldn't it have been terrible if she had been a grown lady, and poor little Esther would have had to wear a pink-silk party-gown and a fur-trimmed ulster?"

Cora laughed merrily at this, and then stopped in astonishment at her own gaiety and burst into tears.

Mike, coming in to say that Dr. Dudley's car was at Esther's disposal, stood abashed. His kind Irish face was filled with sympathy.

"I can take her to my mother whenever you think best," he said to Esther.

"How do you know your mother will want her?" asked Esther, drawing Mike into the next room.

"Because I am after knowing my mother," the boy answered simply. "She will keep her for a time, anyhow, and then the poor thing can look around a bit."

And so Cora, who had started the day with the determination of sharing a watery grave with her baby, found herself, instead, with all that was left of Esther's June allowance in

her pocket, besides a generous yellow-backed bill from Dr. Dudley. Her old brown-calico dress was discarded for a neat blue voile, and in a bundle were other gifts from the girl. The doll baby trunk was at her feet, filled with dainty clothes for her baby. Esther was by her side.

It had been decided that Cora was to rent a room at the home of Mike's mother. When Esther returned, after having established Cora in her new home, she found her father in the kitchen with Mammy.

"You and Mammy are not angry with me, are you, Daddy?"

"No, indeed, my child, but I wonder that you knew what to do." Dr. Wallace drew her to him.

"Why, Daddy, I did what I was sure my mother would have done. She would have sympathized with that poor girl, I am certain. I almost felt that she stood by my side and told me what to do. You see, Cora was in such a state that if I had said the wrong thing she would have run right into the water. Something told me to talk about the baby — and, you see, it turned out all right."

"Gawd in Heaben!" ejaculated Mammy, and Dr. Wallace held Esther close to his heart.

## Chapter 17

### A MOMENTOUS DECISION

It was decided! It took much discussion, many sleepless nights for several persons, arguments pro and con, even some tears, but the conclusion was finally reached that Esther must go off to a New York boarding school.

Marian Carley put it into her head. Marian was going, and naturally wanted her chum to go too. Esther wanted to go, and still she didn't want to go. She loved her home intensely; she loved her father; she loved Mammy; she loved good Jim Dudley, as though he had been the big brother she had always longed for. It would be hard to leave all of these loved ones, but on the other hand it would be such sport to go to boarding-school — to get to know rafts of new girls and see all kinds of good plays and pictures.

Miss Hunter, the art teacher who had taken such interest in Esther, was decidedly in favor of her going, if it could be arranged that much of her time might be spent at some good art school. Esther was eighteen. She had reached

a moody age. One minute she was sad and depressed; the next her sunny disposition would again assert itself. Her dislike for Mrs. Richards had not abated an iota, but nobody but Mammy suspected it. That perfect lady had made herself indispensable to the two doctors. She was always on time, never made mistakes, was always courteous to patients, was never tired, never complaining. There she sat day after day, month after month, answering the telephone, keeping accounts, working on her never-ending orders for baby caps.

Gradually Dr. Wallace had ceased to be embarrassed in her presence. A certain nun-like quality which the woman possessed had put him at his ease. The doctor's friends had always declared that a person either must be a man or be ill to find any favor with Andrew Wallace. Mrs. Richards was neither, but still she was certainly creeping into his friendship. He even consulted her about Esther at times, and her opinion as to the advisability of letting the girl go to boarding-school was what finally made him decide to give in to Esther's entreaties.

"She is anxious to go, and certainly it can do her no harm," she said cautiously. "She is not much of a student, you tell me. Her desire is to paint, and New York will offer much

greater advantages than this southern city. And then — but perhaps I had better not say what was in my mind.”

“Oh, say it — do, please! I want your advice!” was his eager plea.

“Of course, it is not my place to criticise Miss Wallace, and I do not mean to. She is a charming girl in every way. Perhaps she is a little bit too friendly with all kinds and conditions of people. Of course, I believe in being democratic, but having been placed as I have since the death of my husband,” here she dropped her eyes and Dr. Wallace felt very sorry for her, “I have found it necessary to draw the line very carefully for myself and my daughter. It is easier to sink than to rise, and if one chooses associates beneath one, it is difficult to keep one’s standing.”

“Surely, but how does that apply to Esther?”

“It does not exactly, but I have noticed she has a tendency to be quite familiar with — with — menials. Of course I am not speaking of your colored cook. That is quite different, although no doubt it would be well for her to have some other standards of comparison. I am really thinking of that Cora, who is hardly a proper companion, and of Mike, your chauffeur. Mike is no doubt a nice Irish boy, but



it is hardly suitable for your daughter to spend half the afternoon out in the garage talking to him."

"Well — but —"

"You see, I should not have spoken."

"Oh, no! That is all right! You should have spoken, and I am much obliged to you. I think you don't quite understand my daughter."

"Oh, indeed I do! I am not criticising her at all. I think it is quite natural for her to do just as she does, but I also think it would be well for her to spend a year of her life where her manners would be shaped by cultured, accomplished ladies rather than by a colored servant, no matter how devoted that servant may be."

"Perhaps you are right. Poor Mammy! Esther's going will be hard on the old woman. She has been the only mother the child has known."

"Your wife died when the baby was born?"

"Y-e-s — that is, soon after." The doctor shut up like a clam. He wished he could tell this woman about Esther. He did not relish the idea of acting a part before her, but the habit of the last seventeen years was strong on him and he resisted the temptation of making a clean breast of the matter.

"It is hard on a girl to have to bring herself up as Miss Wallace has done," she went on gently.

"But Mammy has brought her up."

"Of course, she has done her duty by her to the best of her ability, but one could hardly expect an ignorant old colored woman to know all the usages of good society." Mrs. Richards' manner was so perfect that although her words jarred a bit on her employer he was sure she meant to be kind and that her advice was good.

No doubt Esther was too free and easy with Mike. Perhaps Mammy could not teach deportment to a young lady. Esther's manners seemed to him to be very good, but was he a judge of what a young girl's manners should be? Perhaps not!

"Naturally," Mrs. Richards continued, "Miss Wallace has inherited a poise, a *savoir faire*, from her ancestors. Blood will tell — it *does* tell in her case. She is the most aristocratic-looking young girl of my acquaintance. But a good finishing-school in New York would be beneficial to any girl, even the most refined."

Blood will tell! Dr. Wallace wondered just what it would tell. Would Esther develop the same traits as her mother? What were these traits? The more he thought about it, the

gladder he was that he had not succumbed to the momentary temptation of divulging Esther's story to Mrs. Richards. Nothing would ever drag it from him. Of that much he was sure. If a New York boarding-school would help his child, then she must go.

Mammy agreed with her master that it was right for Esther to go. It was hard to give her up, doubly hard for Mammy just at that time, because the cataracts on her eyes had now reached the point where an operation would be necessary. The brave old soul kept this to herself. Esther must be gone and settled in her new life before she would confess that the time had come. There must be nothing to make the child sad when she left home.

Young Dr. Dudley was the only person who freely and boldly declared himself opposed to the scheme.

"It is ridiculous," he insisted. "What can you get in New York that you can't get here? A boarding-school will put all kinds of airs in your head and ruin you, simply ruin you."

"You went out of your own city for an education and your city was bigger than ours," said Esther with a toss of her head.

"But I'm a man!"

"But I'm a woman!"

Jim laughed. The pretty, glowing girl could assert she was a woman all she wanted to, but he could think of her only as the delightful child who had let down the hem of her dress and tucked up her curls to impress him. That had been three years ago, but those years had passed very quickly. He, Jim Dudley, did not feel a day older than he had on that night in March when he came to live at the old Grant house, and he did not realize that Esther was any older either. He would miss her greatly — quite as much as Mammy or Dr. Wallace. She was like a dear little sister to him, though not exactly a sister — more like a cousin perhaps, a cousin close enough to tease and romp with, but not so close that it might not be possible in the future when she was quite grown up — “No, that is absurd!” thought Jim. Esther was nothing but a child, and would be a child for a long time to come.

“Well, tell me, Mrs. Methuselah, why are you going?”

“Oh, I have a million reasons. First, I am going to study drawing. I am going to draw and draw, and then draw some more. I think I can do something if I only work hard enough. I have been doing Mike while he tinkered with the cars, and Miss Hunter said some fine things

about it. I am to take those studies to show at the art school. Besides," continued the girl, "I want to see all kinds of people and things. I want to go to shows, and hear music, and see the animals in the zoo, and ride on a Fifth Avenue bus, and see the Rembrandts in the Metropolitan. Why, Jim, I want to do so many things it would make your head swim."

"But how about all of us at home? What are we to do? Don't you think about us?"

"Oh, pooh! You can do very well without me — all but Mammy. I feel terribly bad about leaving Mammy. Of course, Daddy will miss me and I'll miss him, but he is so busy all the time and Mrs. Richards looks after his office so well, I reckon he will hardly know I've gone before I'll be back."

Jim looked keenly at the girl. A hard expression had come in her eyes when she mentioned Mrs. Richards. Was she jealous of the person who was of so much assistance to her father? That seemed strange for a child of her genial, sunny disposition.

"Mrs. Richards's daughter is coming home, so she tells me. She is not very well, and her mother wants to have her near her."

"Yes, poor girl! I hope she will be better," said Esther, sympathetically.



"She must be a fine girl."

"I am sure she is."

"She has studied hard, and for the last three or four winters has been able to keep herself at school by teaching and coaching in the summer. She is certainly an admirable girl."

"No doubt!"

"Her mother is very proud of her. All of her friends must be," continued Jim with singular obtuseness. He did not notice Esther's rising color and flashing eyes.

"I hope you are going to make as good use of your time at school as Miss Richards has done." Jim felt himself to be old enough to preach a bit occasionally to his little friend.

"Well, I'm not, Jim Dudley, so there! You need not be holding up the daughter to me. I've had the perfect mother before my eyes until I am sick of her, and if the daughter is going to be stuck on the pedestal by her side, I am glad I won't have to be here to see it. I know Lucile Richards mends her gloves, and keeps her veils in envelopes, and can open her bureau drawers and find her things in the dark because they are arranged so straight. I know she keeps shoe-trees in her shoes, and wraps her best hat up in tissue paper. I am sure she can do her algebra with her eyes shut, and can say

the kings of England backwards and forwards. She can even find her place in the prayer book on special Sundays and holidays. I know she is a little tin angel, and you are welcome to her. So there!"

The young man gazed at the girl in astonishment. He had never seen Esther in such a temper, and over nothing, in his opinion. He could not know that, for many months, she had repressed all this feeling about the Richards, mother and daughter, and now his praise of the daughter was more than she could stand.

He smiled in what Esther chose to consider a superior manner, and left the room.

"Now I've made the prince mad!" Esther said to herself. Jim was "the prince" to Esther in her communings with herself. "But he is too preachy," she admitted. "He talks more like a minister than a doctor. Well, he'll have to stay angry, that's all."

## Chapter 16

### ALMOST A PROPOSAL

The child was gone! Mammy put up a brave front until Mike turned the corner in his best style. She knew that Esther was still waving her little white handkerchief, but her half-blinded eyes were totally blinded by tears as she stumbled into the house and groped her way back to the kitchen.

“Gone, gone! And I couldn’t see her sweet face — nothin’ but the shine roun’ her haid like one er them there angels in the church winder whar her hair made a hello. I ain’t nebber gonter see her no mo’.”

“Aw, g’long, you ol’ cry baby!” Always, in moments of trial or trouble, Mammy found consolation in dialogues with her dual personality. “You’s a gonter see her plenty ernough. Doc Andy’s gonter git the canteracks off’n yo’ eyes befo’ long and you’s gonter be good as new.”

“The mascot’s done lef’ the house an’ good luck done gone wif her,” whined the uncomforted one.

"Dry up, nigger, dry up! If'n good luck's dònè lef' the house, it's becuse you is a hoodoo."

"You see if'n 'tain't so! You mark my words, if good luck ain't done gone. We done had sebenteen year er prosperity an' happiness, an' now is the time fer the locuses er kerlamity ter come an' deverstare the lan'." She covered her head with her apron, and rocked back and forth, moaning. "The sebenteen-year locuses is a gonter feed on us an' eat up all our good luck. They's gonter be sadness an' misery fer this ol' nigger an' fer my marster."

"They'll be sadness an' misery plenty if'n you don't git ter wuck. They won't be nothin' in this here kitchen fer the sebenteen-year locuses ter eat on if'n you don't make down yo' braid an' put them herrin' ter soak."

"I don't make no min' what we eats or what we drinks wif my Esther baby gone."

"Yes, an' you knows moughty well what Doc Andy will tak ter drink if'n he ain't fed up proper. A man what done drowned his sorrers onct in sperets knows whar ter git comfort whin things goes comtrary. You go a-whinin 'roun' wif a face as long as a ham, an' yo' talk 'bout bad luck done a-comin, an' 'fo you knows it, Doc Andy'll 'member the goin's-on er his youth an he'll return ter thim lak lil pins ter

one of thim there magnits. Git up from here, nigger, an' git ter wuck."

The house was gloomy without Esther. The two doctors looked at each other across the table and wondered how they could stand it. Mammy stalked to and from the kitchen, her face set in determined lines. Her duty was clear. She must make the best of her loneliness and cook all the doctor's favorite dishes so that he would not turn for comfort to the dread liquor.

Jim Dudley wondered if it would not be perfectly all right for him to move himself and his belongings to a cheerful apartment. It was ridiculous for him to go on living with Dr. Wallace — like an apprentice, as it were. He was a partner, now, no longer an assistant, and it was high time for him to set up an establishment for himself. Whenever he had suggested going, so many objections had been raised by the combined household that he had given up any plans he might have made. Everybody wanted him to stay and he had been happy to comply. But with Esther gone, the place seemed like a dungeon. There were as many windows as there ever had been, but the light did not seem to come in so brightly by day, and by night a gloom dimmed the lamps as though they needed trimming.



Jim was sorry he had let Esther go without making up with her, but she had borne herself with such ludicrous dignity, for one of her years, whenever he had been present after their little tiff, that he had been unable to make up his mind to eat the humble pie. And this, apparently, was what Esther expected him to do. He could not see in what way he had offended. She must realize, he reflected, that she had been very rude to him. But now she was gone, and he would give anything to have apologized, if that was what she expected of him. She must have had some good cause for flying off the handle, as she had done. Perhaps she was nervous over leaving her father, unhappy over poor Mammy, sorry she had decided to go. At any rate, she was his dear little friend, and he—well, he was years older than she, and it was up to him to make her going-away a happy one rather than to have it clouded by any misunderstanding.

“I’ll write to her to-night,” was his determination as he seated himself at the sad supper-table. Opposite him sat Dr. Wallace, looking like he was at a wake, while Mammy groped her way in and out with the dishes which she had prepared with such care and which nobody wanted to eat.

“As for leaving Dr. Wallace — I can't do it. He would die of the doleful dumps if I should. Why doesn't the man marry again? He needs a wife, and Esther would be better off with a step-mother; but I pity the lady if she jumps on her as she did on me.” This came into Jim Dudley's mind while they were in the midst of supper. By the time they lit their cigars the thought came back to him with renewed force, and added to it was the idea that Mrs. Richards was the very wife for his middle-aged friend. Good-looking; a lady — all but her voice; efficient and capable; of a suitable age, and so forth, and so forth — yes, she was the very one. He wondered he had never thought of it before. He also wondered if the idea had ever come into Esther's head and if that had been the reason for her outbreak. He wondered still more if the idea had ever come into the well-ordered brain of the office attendant.

Jim did write to Esther that night. He went to his room early, leaving a silent and moody host to fight out his loneliness in the library, where every chair and picture reminded him in some way of his child. Jim tried to talk to him, but meeting with no response, he finally gave up and retired to write to his little friend.

The letter was a long one and not at all

preachy. He began with an humble apology for whatever he had done to anger her. He told her, with variations, how much he missed her — how much all of them missed her. He carefully refrained from any mention of the office attendant. He tried not to seem too grown-up, and indeed he felt like a boy as he penned the long, affectionate letter. As he wrote, the thought came to him that Esther might meet some artist, or actor, or somebody, in her search for amusement and learning who might capture her warm little heart. The idea was exceedingly distressful. He knew that she was too young for him to speak of love. But suppose someone else did not think so?

“Don't fall in love,” he wrote, “and if you do, promise me to let me know about it so I can come to New York and extinguish the wretch. I know you look on me as an old fossil, but remember, my dear, that you are getting older all the time and I am getting younger. I can't ask you to think of me yet as anything but a dear, dear friend, but — but never mind what!

“Your devoted servant,

“Jim Dudley.”

Esther prized that letter greatly. It was

almost a proposal, but not quite. She usually showed her letters to Marian, but this one she felt was too personal. She locked it away in her desk, and whenever she felt homesick, got it out and re-read it. It was a great comfort to her, a girl of seventeen, going on eighteen, to have had a near-proposal, and from a near-prince at that.

When Jim finished his letter, not being quite certain of Esther's address, he went back to the library to ask Dr. Wallace for it. He found the older man sitting in his armchair gazing at a little water-color portrait he had in his hand. It was an amateurish painting of a pretty lady with very yellow hair and very blue eyes and a pensive expression. On the table was a bottle recently opened and near it stood a half emptied glass.

"Have a drink, Dudley?"

"No, thank you, sir!" Jim was astonished to find his chief indulging himself with a drink. It was a well-known fact that Dr. Wallace never touched liquor in any form.

It had evidently cheered him up. He looked much more genial than he had at supper.

"I have just been writing to Esther and want her address."

"You lost no time," smiled Dr. Wallace.



"I thought I would wait until to-morrow. You had better have a drink. This bottle of whisky has been waiting to be opened for more than eighteen years. Pity it doesn't age in the bottle — pretty good, though, pretty good!" He poured himself another drink.

"What is that picture? I have often noticed it and meant to ask," said Jim. He was sorry to see his chief taking another drink. One had evidently had its effect on him.

"Esther's mother. She did it from imagination."

"Really? It looks like Esther a little."

"Yes, so it does."

"Does it look like her mother?"

"I — I don't know." The liquor was certainly having a strange effect on his chief if he didn't know whether a picture resembled his dead wife or not.

"I have been telling Esther how much we miss her," Jim went on. "The truth of the matter is, Dr. Wallace, I believe I am in love with Esther. I didn't know it until she got out of the way, and I know she is too young for me to tell her so, but I don't want any long-haired artist guy getting in ahead of me. I feel somehow that I should tell you, her father, about it."



Dr. Wallace looked at his young partner in astonishment. So it had come, the time when he must, in honor bound, tell of Esther's birth! He knew it would come some time — not for years and years, he had hoped — and here it was upon him. No doubt the liquor made it possible for him to break the silence of all these years. It was warming up his veins, and his head seemed very clear and light. The whole scene came back to him with vividness.

The men talked until far in the night. Dr. Wallace told Jim the story of the foundling, leaving out nothing, not even the old serge jacket and the bits of lawn, and the pattern for baby-clothes.

"Poor little Esther, poor child, poor child!" was all Jim could say.

"And now, perhaps, you had better not send that letter — that is, if you committed yourself in any way. A man doesn't always want to give his name to a nameless one," said Dr. Wallace brokenly.

"Not send it! Why, my dear Doctor, I am going out to-night to mail it. Esther is Esther! As for her poor mother, who knows what she might have been? She may have been all her child imagines her to have been, and if that is the case, she was good and pure."

The older man's face cleared, and he gazed at his young assistant admiringly. "There is no expression I hate so much, as 'Blood will tell,'" he said, "and it seems to me it is used oftener about my child than any other. What will it tell, and why should it tell anything? If only she will never know about her mother! It would kill her."

"She never shall," declared Jim, his voice trembling.

The two men grasped hands.

"Shall I put the bottle back, sir?"

"Yes, and lock it up, please."

## Chapter 18

### PLANNING FOR A CATCH

The well-ordered brain of the office attendant was an unsounded depth to Jim Dudley — or any other man, for that matter. The calm exterior she presented to the world afforded no indication of her thoughts, as, day in and day out, she sat in the office attending to her duties and plying her clever needle with untiring precision and zeal.

There was one person who understood thoroughly what was under that calm exterior, and that was the daughter, Lucile. Her black eyes searched out the innermost workings of her mother's heart and mind, as surely as an X-ray photograph will disclose the flaws and imperfections of the photographed object.

It may be that Mrs. Richards did not care to conceal her real self from Lucile, or perhaps she could not. At any rate, mother and daughter had no secrets from one another. Whatever rôles they played on the world's stage, when they were alone together they could drop their parts and be themselves.

Mrs. Richards experienced the same satisfaction in being able to let herself go in her daughter's presence that a stout woman might feel in loosening her stays. To doff the stiff tight garb of perfectness and don the kimona of human frailties, was a relief indeed.

Lucile had been away from her mother for several years. A pupil-teacher during the winter, she earned her living in the summer by coaching children. Her health had been impaired by the constant work, and she found it necessary to take a rest. Her return home had fitted very well into her mother's plans, but it was a bitter pill for the girl to swallow. She did not want to give up. Coming home was exceedingly distasteful to her. She loved her mother after a fashion, but she loved her better when she did not have to see too much of her. The independent life she had led for the last two or three years had been the happiest time of her youth, and she did not relish the restrictions she felt sure her mother would put upon her. Lucile did not mind playing a part not altogether in character, but she preferred selecting her own part, uninfluenced by her mother. The comforts and luxuries of wealthy homes where she had spent several summers in coaching the children of the rich, had made her

dissatisfied with the simpler life of her girlhood.

"I hate poverty," she declared with vehemence as she placed a light delicatessen supper on the table. Her mother had come in from her day's work. "Potato salad, sliced ham, baker's bread and cocoa made without milk! Day after day the same kind of stupid food! I don't see how you stand it, Mother."

"Oh, I have an excellent dinner every day. That bossy old darkey at Dr. Wallace's can cook almost well enough for one to forgive her for her disagreeable ways, and the doctor is a lavish provider." Mrs. Richards had taken off her spotless white shirtwaist and linen skirt, and after carefully folding them up, had put on a pink-silk kimona. "The spoiled daughter left to-day for boarding school. Horrid child!"

"In what way?"

"Oh, every way as far as I am concerned! While she takes pains to hide it, I can see she hates me."

"What makes her hate you? Surely, you have been polite to her." There was an open sneer on Lucile's handsome face.

"Certainly you know me well enough to be sure that I have given her no cause for disliking me. Perhaps she divines the future, and resents the relationship."



"Mother! Have you really caught him?"

"Almost! He doesn't know it though."

"What a clever mother you are!" There was still a slight sneer on the girl's lip, but her black eyes sparkled with appreciation of her mother's ability.

"Wait until the ceremony is performed before you praise me too highly. 'There's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip,' you know," said Mrs. Richards, laughing heartily and loudly. Nobody at Dr. Wallace's had ever heard Mrs. Richards laugh out loud. That was one thing Esther had against her.

"Mother, are you absolutely certain my father is dead? You have never heard it for sure, have you?"

"Oh, my dear, what a question to bring up! Of course he is dead, otherwise he would have turned up long ago — if not for love of me, for love of you. It has been about eighteen years now since he deserted me, the brute!"

"I wouldn't call him names. I fancy you nagged him, eh? I can just remember him, and I must say he had you skinned a block in some ways."

"You say that because you are just like him. He didn't know the first thing about gratitude."

Mother and daughter often spoke to each

other with perfect frankness, indulging in cutting truths, but they seldom got angry, seeming rather to enjoy the luxury of speaking out.

“I don't see why you didn't get a divorce years ago. Then his being alive or dead would make no difference in your plans.”

“A divorce indeed! My widowhood has brought me in too many returns for me to give it up for a mere divorce. When a woman gets a divorce, there is always somebody to say it was her fault, but there is nothing but sympathy for a bona fide widow,” said the mother, helping herself to a large slice of ham.

“What will be your next move?”

“That would be telling.”

“You don't know it, then,” laughed the girl.

The next move came much sooner than Mrs. Richards had planned to make it. She was a woman who bided her time. She had felt from the first day of her work as office attendant that Dr. Wallace might be her solution. She was tired of work; tired of holding the lowly place in society that her poverty necessitated; tired of playing the part of noble mother and bereaved wife; tired of the neat, severely-plain clothes that she affected. As the wife of Dr. Wallace, she would come into possession of what she pleased to consider her right — a life of com-

parative ease, good clothes and a place in society. She was still young in appearance; handsome, surely, and could be clever and agreeable when she wanted to be.

She liked Dr. Wallace, although in her heart she had a humorous contempt for him because of his constant deference to Mammy and his silly adoration of Esther. The shrewd woman had early realized that Esther and Mammy were her stumbling blocks. So long as they were around, she felt she could never bring the timid doctor to a realization of her charms, but once they were out of the way, she felt almost sure of her ultimate success.

She was a little afraid of Peter Roche, too. There was something searching, disquieting, in the eye of the silent lawyer. She did not see him often, as he usually called at night after she had gone home, but the few times that she had met him, she had experienced an uneasy feeling that he was looking through her.

Jim Dudley she liked, and felt that he liked her. He was always so kind and courteous. She wished he had been fifteen years or so older; then she would have preferred to direct her machinations toward him. He would have been a much more desirable partner than Dr. Wallace. She had not taken her many weeks to discover

that the young man had an independent fortune, although he chose to work so hard in his profession.

“He will do for Lucile, if only she has sense enough to play her cards right,” she had decided, but she said nothing to the girl about his desirability. She had learned that the way to manage her daughter was to seem to let her manage herself. She had bidden Esther good-bye with a sense of elation.

“One stumbling block gone!” she exulted. “Now, if only the old darkey could be shipped off somewhere!”

## Chapter 19

### MAMMY LOSES HER WAY

Mammy was planning for the operation on her eye. She had determined to get the house in apple-pie order, after which she would be free to take in a young colored girl and train her in the way she should go. When the new girl had learned to cook the dishes most acceptable to her master, Mammy planned to go to bed, have the cataracts removed from her eyes and direct the household from her pillow. She had found the right girl, if such a one existed, but Mammy had little use for the rising generation of "free niggers." Just as soon as she could get the linen press in order and place clean papers on the pantry shelves, she planned to start in on the new servant.

Her sight was growing dimmer and dimmer. "Minds me er that time the sun got 'clipped an' all the chickens wint ter roost in the day time," she told Dr. Dudley, who had inquired how she felt. "Our ol' blue hin done laid two aigs that day. She wa' allus a befo' han'



chicken from the fust beginnin'. She bus' through her shell whin the res' of the settin' wa'n't studyin' 'bout hatchin' fur two days an' had ter be raised behin' the kitchen stove in a barskit. Whin she got ter the pullet age, she started in ter layin' 'thout no emcouragemint an' she kep' it up stiddy. That ol' hin wa' allus afeerd she wouldn't git fust go at a nist, an' she used ter do her wuck fust thing in the mawnin', pretty nigh by sunnup. She wa' quick ter hop on the roost, too. That time what I wa' a-talkin' bout, whin the sun got 'clipped, ol' Blue, she got on the roost as soon as it beganned ter grow darksome an' she wint off ter sleep lak the 'spectable hin she wa' raised ter be. Bless Gawd, though, whin the sun comed out from behim the darkness, that ol' hin hopped down from her perch an' 'thout no ado whatsoever she got in that nist an' 'complished a puffec'ly good aig — the sicond one that day."

Dr. Dudley laughed. He often went into the kitchen to have a little chat with Mammy. He liked to have her talk to him about Esther, and of course nothing gave the old woman greater pleasure.

"What a delightful old hen was old Blue! She must have been a valuable asset."

"She wa'n't a setter at all. It looked lak

she didn't want ter be worried with a stiddy fambly. She lef' settin' ter the lazy ones what didn't min' stayin' up in the baid fer three weeks time. Ol' Blue wa' allus up an' doin'. Whin she got that early aig laid she uster hep scratch fer the lil chicks what wa' onlucky 'bout bugs an' sich."

Not many weeks after Esther left for New York, the morning came when Mammy could see nothing but a shimmer of light. She had miscalculated. The linen press was in order, and the pantry shelves had fresh papers, but the new servant had not been broken in — had not even arrived for training. She was to have started that very day.

Jim Dudley had gone on a visit to Kentucky, and Dr. Wallace had been called out of town to see an ailing patient in a neighboring county. Mammy had spent the night alone in the old house. She had worked late, determined to have everything exactly right as an example to the incoming maid.

"She cyarn't say she foun' ary dirt here, an' no chany what she kin say wa' cracked whin she come," she muttered as she put the finishing touches to an all but perfect kitchen.

"She kin 'clar what she choose ter 'clar," Mammy's second voice blurted out in aggres-

sive tone. "Free nigger merlatters ain't 'ticular 'bout the truf."

Mammy busied herself locking the doors and windows. She went from room to room, carefully bolting and barring.

In the dining-room she stopped in front of the sideboard. She passed her hands over the array of shining silver: christening mugs which had belonged to dead and gone Wallace babies; a massive service presented to a colonial ancestor in token of some diplomatic mission in which he had been successful; a loving cup supposed to have belonged to George Washington. All of them safe! She opened the drawers and passed her fingers lightly over the rows of knives, forks and spoons, counting over the pieces set by set.

"Ain't nary one er them a-missin in my time," she said, proudly. "I ain't never yit th'owed a piece er silber out in the slops lak I hearn tell the young generation do. They ain't a keerin'!"

"Ain't you afeerd some robber mought break in an' steal all that there silber whilst Doc Andy is away?" came the timorous and whining voice.

"Robber much! You's all time puttin' things inter my haid."

"Well they mought."

"Yes an' agin they moughtn't. But sence you is sich a 'frait cat p'rhaps I'd jis' as well set a trap fer the debbles. I'll jes' barumcade the do' an' winders."

Laboriously she piled chairs in front of the windows, pushing the table up against the door leading into the bath.

"Now, if'n ary one comes in, he'll bump inter these here cheers an' the noise'll woken me," she remarked with satisfaction and went cheerfully off to bed.

Daylight came but not for Mammy. She lay in bed some time after she had awakened, waiting for dawn.

"High time the sun wa' up, but th'ain't nebber no countin' on the sun these days," she complained. "I reckon I mought as well git up out'n this baid, though. Ev'ybody cyarn't be lazy."

She felt for her matches and candle, struck a match, knew by the heat against her fingers it was burning, but the glimmer of flame was so faint aand hazy it made no more light than the new moon on a misty night. She struck another and another.

Suddenly the truth dawned on her. "I wa'n't spectin' it so soon," she said. Sadly and slowly the poor old woman dressed herself. Her



orderly habits made it a simple thing for her to find her clothes and put them on.

Slowly she descended the stairs, cautiously feeling her way.

"Praise Gawd, I got everything in order an' whin that there merlatter gal comes 'praps I kin git her a-goin with the wuck 'thout lettin' on I is plumb blin'. She mought be onrespectful ter me if she knowed I couldn't see."

"The kitchen fire fust an' the kittle on ter bile. Then unlock the back do'."

Blindness had come on so gradually that now that it had arrived Mammy found she could get along surprisingly well. The fire was already laid, and a match to it started it crackling cheerily.

"My ears is as good as ebber. If I couldn't hear the fire a-cracklin, I mought hab somethin' ter growl about. Now the kittle!"

The next thing on Mammy's matutinal program was opening up the house and shaking down and filling the latrobe stoves, one in the dining-room and one in the office. Large coal boxes in the passage outside the kitchen were kept filled by a boy whose business it was to come after school and split kindling and bring up coal. Mammy waged a never-ending warfare with this boy whose identity changed every



few weeks. Sometimes he was white, sometimes colored, sometimes big, sometimes little, but according to Mammy he was always trifling and lazy, inclined to track dirt in her kitchen, and mix the anthracite coal, meant for the range and latrobes, with the splint, burned in the grates alone.

“Done mix it up agin,” she said angrily. “He thinks ’cause my eyes ain’t so good as they useter was that I cyarn’t tell hard coal from sof’ but I’ll fool him. There’s a lump er sof’ — an’ there’s anudder! Fixin’ ter put out the fire in the ’trobe. He knows sof’ coal ain’t no good in a ’trobe.” Grumblingly she picked out the larger lumps of soft coal. “I kin tell ’em, I kin tell ’em!”

Mammy was strong and agile for her years. A scuttle of coal was nothing for her to lift. She handled it with ease.

“Dining-room ’trobe fust an’ thin the shutters,” she mumbled. “’Tis a good thing I know my way ’roun’ this here house. I know which side er ev’y do’ the han’le is on; I know whar ev’y stick er furnisher is. I been allus holdin’ ter the ol’ time saying: ‘A place fer ev’ything an’ ev’ything in its place.’”

“Huh! Specially niggers!” growled the old woman’s alter ego in a tone of sarcasm. “You

ain't all time 'membered ter keep yo'se'f in yo' place. Many a time you see fit ter boss the white folks. How yo' 'splain that?"

"Well, honey, ain't they need bossin'? Wa' I ter set still an' see my lil baby's life a ruint jes' fer the lack er a lil managin'? Doc Andy, he's as good as gol', but he ain't right smart 'bout lots er things. He's too scairt er women folks ter be right smart. 'Cose, he's a moughty fine 'doctor, moughty fine."

Mammy had made her way to the dining-room through the swinging door leading into the passage. She put down her heavy bucket for a moment and stood erect, the better to confront her accusing self.

"If I'd a listened ter you an' yo' fraid cat whinings 'bout not meddlin' in white folks business, my lil Esther baby would a been in a orphamige, mo'n likely, or would a been brung up wif ev'ybody a-knowin she wa' a foumlin' 'thout no certain parentage. An' look at her now! Th'ain't no princuss in the lan' what kin hol' her haid higher."

Triumphant in her defense she stooped and picked up the scuttle of coal. In stopping and turning to confront her accusing other self, she had lost her sense of location. She started in what she thought was the direction of the

latrobe stove, but bumped into the swinging door. She turned in another direction and excitedly darted forward.

At one time or another almost everyone has experienced the sensation of being lost amid familiar surroundings, of groping wildly in the dark for door or mantle that one would have sworn was right under his hand but which, by some strange miscalculation of distance or direction, proved to be located in an entirely different part of the room. A match is struck or a button touched, and the light reveals the mistake. How foolish and helpless one feels!

"Whar that stove? Thar it is!" but it proved to be the wall. "Well, the table is in the middle er the room, that's sho, an' whin I reach that, I kin perceed."

She had completely forgotten the barricade she had formed the night before, and with one hand outstretched, the other still firmly grasping the heavy bucket, she made for the center of the room — at least, what she thought was the center. No table! What a big room it was! It seemed to the old woman to stretch for miles.

"'Trobe has went out or I could see the glow. Sho I could see the glow! I could if'n I could git clost ter it."

She made another essay into the darkness. Again she came up against a blank wall.

“Keep ter the wall, you ol’ idjit!”

“Cose! Keep ter the wall an’ hump yo’s’e’f. You ain’t got no time ter be a trapsin’ roun’ this room.”

She started moving rapidly and with a violent impact plunged against one of her barricades. Her forehead struck the protruding leg of a chair, stunning her. She grasped wildly in the air. Dropping the bucket of coal, she caught the back of one of the piled-up chairs, pulling over the barricade. For a moment she was conscious of a violent pain in her hip, and then darkness ensued.

## Chapter 20

### THE IDENTIFICATION OF MRS. RICHARDS

“I rang the door bell repeatedly!” Mammy heard someone say in tones a little sharp.

She had been lying on the floor for what seemed to her days and weeks. She had no idea where she was, but wherever it was, it was exceedingly uncomfortable. Some heavy object was on her feet, and something sharp was sticking in her chest. With her fingers she could feel small hard bits of something all around her, and the same hard things were under her back. Whenever she would try to remember what had happened, she would feel herself clutching wildly for something, she knew not what, and then would float off into unconsciousness. One thing she knew, and seemed to know it whether she was entirely conscious or not, and that was that a knife blade was in her hip.

The sharp tones of a woman's voice brought her back to earth when she was floating off again.



“ I rang the door bell repeatedly! ”

Now she knew where she was. It was June and the baby had just had her bath and was sleeping on the back porch. She had weighed her only that morning and Doc Andy had helped. She had loitered so long over the baby's bath and dressing that the morning was almost gone and no work done. She must have dozed in her chair, for there was somebody at the front door and she had not heard the bell. Was it the telephone? No, it was the back door after all!

“ You mus' 'scuse me, lady, but I gits so imfused over bells. I thought it wa' the phome. Won't you come in an' set a spell? Doc Andy'll be back 'fo' long. An' what a pretty lil gal you is got — you mus' 'scuse me — I never knowed you wa' Mr. Stanley's wife — I ain't nebber knowed he had a wife — I wouldn't a hurt yo' feelin's fer nothin', you an' yo' lil gal's. I mought a knowed you wa' his wife, though. I could a tol' by yo' voice — ” Again the knife was in her hip and unconsciousness ensued.

Mrs. Richards looked down on the unconscious form of one of her stumbling blocks and smiled grimly. She pushed the table aside and went into the office. Taking down the receiver

of the telephone she called the number of the city hospital.

"Please send an ambulance immediately to Dr. Wallace's at Seventy-seven Garden Street. Dr. Wallace is out of town, and in his absence his negro cook has become either crazy or drunk.

"Yes, I am Dr. Wallace's office attendant. I have just come in and found the woman lying on the dining-room floor under a pile of furniture. She is delirious. Come immediately, please, as I am alone in the house."

In an incredibly short time the ambulance, with its white-coated crew, arrived. Mrs. Richards, in the meantime, had busied herself opening up the house and turning on the drafts of the stoves. She did not put the dining-room in order, preferring to leave it just as it was when she found poor Mammy lying under the pile of chairs and on the overturned anthracite coal. Taking a half-filled bottle of brandy from the sideboard, she hurriedly poured some into a glass and placed both bottle and glass on the table.

"Here she is! I think she is drunk," she whispered to the brisk young doctor in charge.

The dining-room, usually so orderly, certainly presented a wild scene. No wonder the young surgeon readily fell into agreement with

Mrs. Richards' diagnosis. He lifted the chairs off the old woman, giving her great relief. She opened her sightless eyes and smiled.

"Now take that there knife out'n my hip an' I'll git up from here an' git ter wuck."

"What is the matter with you?" asked the doctor, sternly.

"Gawd in Hebben knows! I's kinder dazed lak. I thought the baby was sleep on the po'ch an' a lady what tu'ned out ter be Mrs. Richards but what was sho 'nough Mrs. Stanley done come roun' the back an' spoke kinder sharp lak ter me 'bout the do' bell. But who is you, please, sir?"

Mrs. Richards smiled knowingly at the doctor.

"Sounds rather intoxicated, don't you think?" she whispered, pointing at the brandy bottle.

"Well, rather."

"Who is you?" persisted Mammy.

"I am Dr. Tracy from the city hospital. I have an ambulance out here ready to take you off."

"Oh, Gawd in Hebben, mister, please don't take me ter no hawspital. Doc Andy allus been a-promisin me I shouldn't nebber go ter no hawspital. He done tol' me time an' time agin that they kin op'rate right up in my own room.

I done got it as clean as a bis'it boa'd, an I kin git right up in the baid, an' he done said it ain't much of a op'ration, an' I'll be up an' doin' in a short while."

"Well, I'll have to take you there now and you can sleep off your drunk, and then we can see about it," laughed the young man. He was not a callous, unfeeling young man, but ambulance work for the city hospital had dulled the finer sensibilities that he had first carried to his work.

"Sleep off what?" Mammy tried to get up but fell back with a groan.

"Never mind, old woman! You had better be glad it isn't a jail we are taking you to." He called the stretcher-bearers, and without more ado Mammy was lifted up and borne away.

"What I done say?" she muttered. "Good luck done gone wif the mascot!" After that she knew nothing more.

After reaching the hospital a more thorough examination of the patient disclosed the fact that the old woman had sustained serious injuries. Her hip had been fractured. The doctors also discovered the cataracts on her eyes. With skillful hands the fractured bones were set, and while Mammy was still under the influence of ether, her eyes were operated upon and



the troublesome cataracts removed. When the effects of the anaesthetic finally wore off, Mammy found herself in a comfortable bed, covered by fresh, clean sheets. Where she was, she did not know. She put up her hand and felt the bandage on her head.

“Whar is I?”

“You are in your bed in the hospital, Auntie.” The voice was kind and sweet. “You have broken your hip, but it has been set, and the cataracts have been taken off your eyes, too.”

“An’ who is you?”

“I’m the nurse.”

“How come I got here? Doc Andy done said —”

“Never mind, now; you must go to sleep and get well.”

Mammy lay quite still. Little by little the whole thing came back to her. She remembered the barricade she had formed in the dining-room; she remembered waking in the morning and finding she was blind; she remembered lighting the kitchen fire, unlocking the back door and putting on the kettle. Gradually her experience in the dining-room came back to her. Slowly and painfully she recalled her wanderings around the room with the coal



bucket in her vain search for the latrobe stove.

"Cose, you couldn't fin' the table whin you done shove it aginst the do'," she chuckled. "Ol fool nigger!"

She remembered hitting her head against something hard and sharp and falling to the floor.

"Cheer laig, tha's what it wa'! An' them lil hard things I wa' a-layin on wa' hard coal, moughty hard! An thin Mrs. Stanley comed in — no, it wa'n't Mrs. Stanley, it wa' Mrs. Richards — but she said the same thing as Mrs. Stanley 'bout ringin' the bell repeatedly an' she had the same voice. Great Gawd! If'n you ain't the fooles' nigger they is! They is one an' the same! I been a-tryin ter 'member ev'y sence she comed ter wuck ter our house wha' I done hearn that voice befo'. Whe'fo' she done call herse'f Richards if'n she is Stanley? What she hidin'? I mought er knowed whin my Esther baby done tuck sich a hatred er her that they was something wrong 'bout her. An' here I is a laid up in the baid with a bus'ed hip jint, an' blin' besides! Well, I's gonter-bide my time, bide my time!"

## Chapter 21

### A SATISFACTORY EXPLANATION

The mending of a broken hip, especially in the case of a person as old as Mammy, is a slow process. The bandage was taken from her eyes within a few days, but the plaster cast was to stay on her poor fractured hip for many weeks.

Dr. Wallace was deeply distressed at the condition of his faithful old servant. He had returned from his trip a few hours after Mammy had been borne away to the hospital. Mrs. Richards expressed regret that she had not been able to get the dining-room in order before the master came home, but she had been so busy, she said, with things that seemed more important that she had been unable to restore order out of chaos.

"How could it have happened?" asked the troubled doctor.

She pointed silently to the brandy bottle.

"Not Mammy! Why, Mrs. Richards, she has never taken too much to drink in her life. She hates the stuff, in fact."

Mrs. Richards smiled.

"Have you any reason to think she does not hate it?" questioned the doctor.

"Oh, you must know your servant better than I do."

"But, have you?"

"I am not inclined to make trouble in a household, but I have known several times that the old woman was intoxicated. This morning she insisted that I was some woman whose name I have never even heard before. Some fancied resemblance in voice, I think, put it in her head. She was quite disagreeable in her insistence."

"That wasn't like Mammy."

"No, and for that reason, when I saw the opened brandy bottle and the condition of the room, I naturally came to the conclusion that she was a little the worse for the liquor."

"Poor, poor Mammy! She misses Esther so much. I am sure that that is the reason. There is nothing like loneliness for making a person seek solace in alcohol."

Mrs. Richards was very helpful and sympathetic. She immediately took the reins of house-keeping in her hands, and when the girl arrived, who was coming to be trained by Mammy, Mrs. Richards put her to work with as much celerity as Mammy herself would have shown. Dinner was served at exactly the same hour, and while

it lacked the divine touch of the old colored cook, there was nothing to complain of in the food, and the table was certainly beautifully set.

Mrs. Richards was determined that Mammy was not to be missed. She would show Dr. Wallace that the old woman was not necessary to his comfort. Of course he could keep up his sentimental attachment to the ancient darkey if he was of a mind to, but he was to learn that she was not the only housekeeper in the world. Maud, the new girl, was green but teachable, and she was vastly pleased to have the more important place that Mammy's timely illness thrust her into. A butler was engaged, and finally a housemaid. All this entailed a greater expenditure, but Dr. Wallace knew nothing of expenses and cared nothing about them. Money was flowing into his coffers from his now enormous practice, and it was rather pleasant to have his establishment run on a more lavish basis. The fact that it took two maids and a man to do the work that Mammy had accomplished formerly all by herself did not impress him. He had always wanted more servants, but the old woman had rebelled and objected whenever he had broached the subject.

Many and frequent were Dr. Wallace's visits

to the bed-ridden Mammy. He saw to it that she had every comfort in the colored ward of the city hospital. A private room was engaged for her, and Dr. Wallace insisted upon having a private nurse for her, although the old woman almost worried herself into a fever over the expense that she was sure all of these luxuries must entail.

“ I ain't wuth it, I ain't wuth it! ” she would moan.

“ Why, Mammy, you are worth whatever I can do for you. ”

Dr. Wallace said nothing to the old woman about the brandy bottle. The fact that the kindly old soul had fallen from grace had been a severe shock to him. He could not understand it! Mammy intoxicated! How it had come about he could not imagine, but Dr. Wallace, in the course of his extensive practice, had known of people who became addicted to alcohol late in life — old people, who, like Mammy, had never indulged in stimulants in their youth. Indeed, thought the doctor, these cases were the saddest of all. He felt it was loneliness that had caused it. Had he not begun to resort to alcohol to comfort himself? When he was tired, it seemed to rest him; lonely, it cheered him up; wakeful, it put him to sleep. Could



he blame the old woman when she had resorted to a similar remedy?

Maud, the new cook, puffed up with her own importance and delighted with the confidence reposed in her by Mrs. Richards, was not so reticent on the subject of the old woman's supposed shortcomings. She, too, made many and frequent visits to her injured predecessor, and as soon as Mammy was well enough to have the nurse leave her alone with her visitors, the girl took great delight in tormenting her. She was not the meek and lowly person Mammy had imagined her to be; in fact, she was quite the reverse. The truth of the matter was that Mammy, up and doing, Mammy, the capable cook and housekeeper at Dr. Wallace's, the beloved and trusted friend of her master, the foster mother of her young mistress, was very different from the old bed-ridden creature with a broken hip, a bandage over her sightless eyes and her once busy and capable hands helplessly and nervously picking at the coverlid.

"How are you to-day, Aunt Mammy?" asked the girl, seating herself close to the bed.

"Tollable, jes' tollable! How's all ter home?"

"Oh, we alls is comin' on fine. 'Cose, we had right smart cleanin' an' straightenin' up to do

after we got there, but we got it all clean now, an' amongst us we keeps it gran'."

"Who you mean by you alls? Mrs. Richards ain't a-cleanin up, air she? An' what you foun' ter clean up? I done lef' it as clean as the pa'm er my han', an' you knows it."

The girl laughed derisively.

"You might call it clean, but the butler he say —"

"The butler!"

"Umhum, the butler! He say he ain't never come in a house where he had to work so hard to git rid of lef' over dirt."

"What butler you talkin' 'bout?" Mammy's curiosity was thoroughly aroused.

"Dr. Wallace's butler! Don't you know we all is got a butler now an' a housemaid? Sho, Aunt Mammy, you can't 'spect us ladies an' gemman of color, what ain't been born in slavery like you is, to work like slaves. You ain't never knowed nothin' better, but we, what is born free an' ekal, we knows."

Mammy lay so still for a moment that Maud was scared. Had she actually killed the old woman with her news about the butler and the housemaid? The old woman's face looked indescribably gaunt, with the upper part swathed in bandages, and the knotted old hands

were motionless, lying palm upward as though their work was done.

A harsh laugh bursting from the tightly-shut mouth satisfied the girl that her victim was still alive, and so she continued.

"I reckon Dr. Wallace was right put out about your actin' the way you done — his fine French brandy an' all."

"What you mean?" gasped Mammy.

"I reckon you is shamed, an' now you think you kin make out you don't know what I mean. I mean your gittin' so drunk when Dr. Wallace lef' you in charge of his house. It was too bad you got too happy to put the bottle away. If you hadn't a lef' that out, nobody wouldn't have spicioned you, 'cept of course the dining-room did look something awful. My mother wouldn't hardly believe me when I tol' her, 'cause she says she's done knowed you ever sence you come to this town to live, when you jined her sassiety, the Lincoln No. 1, an' she ain't never dreamed of you bein' that kind. She says all the club members was 'stonished, an' Brer Jackson say you ought to be read out in meetin'."

Mammy was so quiet that Maud wondered if the old woman had grasped the true import of her insults. Her old face looked like a

bronze mask as she lay there. And was this her reward? After her long and faithful service to the Wallaces in slavery and in freedom, was she finally to be branded as one who got drunk and betrayed her master's trust; one who left dirt for others to clean up; one who was spoken of in her club and church as disreputable? She almost wished she might die — but no, not yet — not until she knew that her Esther baby was safely married to the young Kentuckian; not until her work was finished.

She reached out and tapped her bell on the table.

“What is it Mammy?” asked the kindly nurse who had her in charge.

“I want to see Doc Andy some time terday. I'll git you to phome him, lady, if 'tain't too much trouble; an' I'll git you ter show this nigger gal out an' leave word to the office that 'Ria Johnson, whose sir name am Mammy, ain't receivin' no mo' niggers. It don't make no diffunce who they is, club mimbers, preachers, nor nothin'. I'm better comp'ny ter myse'lf.”

Dr. Wallace came quickly. The nurse's voice sounded a little excited as it reached him over the telephone.



"What is it, Mammy? You are not worse, are you?"

"No, Doc Andy, I is better — mos' well. They's gonter take off the bandanages tomorrow. My hip is gittin' on tollable an' don't pain me over much."

"Do you have everything you want?"

"Sho, I do! An' my nuss treats me jes' lak I wa' white. I is done change my min' bout hawsitals. Niggers ain't got no since nohow."

"What did you want with me?" asked the doctor, smiling down on his old friend.

"I want ter know if you b'lieved I wa' drunk whin I fell down an' broke my hip."

"Why — why — dear old Mammy," Dr. Wallace took one of the gnarled hands in his affectionately, "you mustn't worry about that —"

"Then you b'lieved it, too?"

"I did not blame you in the least. You were lonesome, I know. I never would have thought of it, if you had not left the brandy bottle out."

"What brandy bottle? Who said I done lef' it out?"

"Mrs. Richards had not had a chance to get the dining-room in order, and she reluctantly pointed it out to me."

"Well, Doc Andy, I ain't nebber tol' but



one lie in my life — that is ter say, one black lie. 'Cose, I done tol' lil kinder playful fibs. That black lie was the one 'bout our baby an' I ain't regrettin' it. Now, you know I is truthful, an' what's mo', you know I ain't nebber been 'dicted ter sperits 'ceptin' fer a lil seasonin' now an' agin, an' if you air gonter set still an' see me branded as a drunk liar, why then I'll jes' ax you ter let me be carried back in the cha'ity ward er this here hawsptial, which is comf'table enough fer niggers, an' thar I'll stay 'til I kin hobble out. I's got insuriance 'nough ter bury me an' sick benefits enough ter keep me goin' 'til I kin fin' wuck."

"Oh, Mammy, Mammy, you are cruel to me! The idea of my allowing things to come to such a pass. I never said you lied. Now, suppose you tell me all about it."

He sat down, and Mammy slowly and carefully recalled the happenings of the night before her sight departed. She told of piling up the chairs and pushing the table against the door. Then she recounted the pitiful tale of her gropings and stumblings in the dark and the final catastrophe.

"Now you kin see what made the room look so turrible an' mixed-up lak. As fer the brandy bottle, Gawd in Hebben knows how it got thar,

an' all in his good time he'll gib us knowledge an' not befo'. Is you sho you b'lieve me now, Doc Andy?"

"Yes, Mammy, I am sure. You must forgive me. Hereafter I'll come straight to you when people say such things. You won't move out in the ward now, will you, Mammy?"

"No, chil'! But you see, I couldn't be beholdin', eben ter a man what I raised from a baby, if'n he ain't got no 'pinion er me."

## Chapter 22

### AN EMPTY HOUSEHOLD

Jim Dudley got back from Kentucky about a week after Mammy's accident. Things had certainly been moving in his absence. He viewed with some amusement the changes in the household. Mrs. Richards and her daughter were installed at Dr. Wallace's, having moved bag and baggage from their small, uncomfortable apartment to the spacious guest chamber over the parlor. The house seemed to be full of servants. Two maids and a butler bustled around, or stood bickering among themselves as to whose business it was to answer bells. Jim remembered with regret the quiet ministrations of Mammy. Above all he missed the never-failing excellence of her cooking.

He made frequent trips to the hospital to see Mammy, and his coming did the old woman more good than all the medicine on earth. To him, and to him alone, did she entrust the reading of Esther's letters. She saved them unopened until he came, and then he would read them aloud. Such happy, sweet letters.

they were, full of love for the old woman, love of home and father, and sometimes even a hint of love for Jim himself. She was deeply distressed over Mammy's accident, and wrote almost every day when she was not kept too busy at school.

Jim also wrote replies to Mammy's letters as long as the poor eyes were bandaged. A long epistle must be sent to the cousin, Liza Ann, in Virginia, telling her all about the troubles that had befallen her kinswoman. Her insurance must be collected from the various sick-benefit concerns, which, up to this time, had reaped a weekly harvest from Mammy's wages.

"I been a-payin' insuriance an' payin' insuriance 'til it wa' jes' lak pourin' water down a rat hole fer all the good I got out er it, but now I is reapin' the fruits er my investigations," she declared, as Jim brought in a roll of bills for her to put under her pillow with Esther's letters.

"Mr. Peter Roche done been ter see me agin an' he sayed he would git arfter that comp'ny what wa' disputatious over my claim. Mr. Peter done sayed the law wa' in 'zistence fer jes' sich folks."

The bandage was taken off, and Mammy's

delight knew no bounds when she found she could really see.

"Seein' is sho the maindest thing in life. Now, whin this ol' hip gits spliced tergether, I's gonter be pretty nigh as good as new. I reckon them butlers an' housemaids an' what not will have ter fin' theyse'fs some new jobs."

The doctors and nurses had not the heart to tell her that perhaps she would never be able to do much work again. The old woman lay there counting the weeks when she would be well enough to take up her duties at Dr. Wallace's.

In the meantime, Esther was writing delightful letters to everybody at home. She was having a wonderful winter but was evidently giving more time to her art than to her other studies. It was decided that she was not to come home for Christmas, as it was a long journey, but instead her father went on to New York to see her. During this visit Esther learned that Mrs. Richards and Lucile had taken up their abode in her father's house. It was a great shock to her, but she said nothing to Dr. Wallace. She could hardly trust herself to speak of the arrangement at all.

"Lucile is at work. Peter got her a job with a lawyer friend," Dr. Wallace continued,



after he had broken the news to Esther of the new housekeeper. "She is a nice girl and so industrious. I am glad to be able to help Mrs. Richards and her daughter a little by freeing them from the financial worries that have harassed them for so many years. Mrs. Richards has made a brave struggle —"

"Still is!" exclaimed Esther.

"Yes, still is. I cannot tell you what a solution it is for me to have her in the house now that poor Mammy is ill. I don't see what I would have done."

"I might have come home."

"Oh, no! I would not have had you do that." The doctor smiled at the thought of the housekeeping Esther would do.

"Let me come now, Daddy, please do! I can't bear to think of you being surrounded by so many strangers."

"But Mrs. Richards is not a stranger. She has been my office attendant for over two years."

Esther said nothing more. It was plain to see that her father was altogether satisfied with the existing arrangements, and objections voiced by her would have little weight.

"What does Mammy think?"

"She hasn't said. Of course, the dear old

woman expects to come back and do all the work as formerly, but she will never be able to do it — never again. I am afraid she will never get along with the other servants. She has been the head of the house for so many years it will be hard for her to have someone else looking after things. I think I shall propose a trip to Virginia to her when she is able to hobble around. She could make a long visit to her cousin, Eliza Ann. Then, when she is well, or better (she will never be really well again), she can come back home. Poor, dear, old Mammy!”

Esther wept many tears over Mammy and over the changed conditions at home. What would home be like, she asked herself, with Mammy off in Virginia and a woman whom she cordially detested keeping house? Esther no longer wanted to go home. The thought of being under the same roof as Mrs. Richards day in and day out was extremely distasteful to her. How could her father and Jim like her? No doubt Jim thought Lucile was a thousand times nicer than she. Perhaps Lucile *was* nicer, too — and much more worthy. Well, she had her art, and she thought of it with a very, very big A — this Art that was to be her solace for the loss of the happy home which

she was sure she would never see again. She kept her trouble to herself, not even confiding her miseries to her dear Marian. Perhaps it would have been better if she had. Marian, who was a year older than her chum, was a sensible, level-headed sort of girl, without too great an endowment of imagination. No doubt she would have viewed the situation in a more practical way, and would have convinced Esther that she was making a mountain out of a mole-hill and life was not so sad after all.

Jim's letters were a great comfort to the girl in her loneliness. He sent her all the news of the neighborhood, and always had something bright and happy to tell about dear Mammy. He seldom mentioned the new housekeeper or her daughter, and when he did, it was quite casually.

As for Jim himself, he had some difficulty in keeping his letters on just the right plane. He wanted to interest her in himself. Yet he did not wish to make the mistake of being too lover-like. To him, Esther was still a girl, more mature perhaps than his little princess of the mulberry patch, but still too young to be spoken to of love.

"Another year or so," he would say to himself, "and then —"

A solution came to Esther when Miss Hunter proposed that she and Marian Carley join a party of several other girls who were about to take a trip to Europe under Miss Hunter's direction. The trip was to last six months, maybe longer. Dr. Wallace agreed to it, although he had been looking forward to having his child home for the summer vacation. It was an opportunity not to be missed. She would see the most famous art galleries in the world, and could take lessons in Paris, where they were planning to stay for three months.

Mammy highly approved of this arrangement. She herself was to be in Virginia, and the old woman knew well that there would be nothing but unhappiness for her baby in the house with Mrs. Richards. To Peter she confided her suspicions concerning the woman. Hobbling into his office one day, to Peter's great surprise, Mammy had said:

"That there woman thinks she gonter ketch Doc Andy, but she is mistook. Nobody ain't gonter ketch him. She gonter plan an' plan, bût the time air gonter come whin Doc Andy'll see her as she am. She tryin' ter buck up against a mascot, an' th'ain't no use. I done seed her face now, an' I knows fer sho she's Mrs. Stanley. She done tried fer me not ter



see her. She ain't nebbber been ter the haws-pital ter see me since my ban'age wa' tuck off, an' whin I wint home ter git my things ready fer my trip, she wint away an' stayed away. But as luck would hab it, I met her on the street. My eyes is open now. I done had a creepy feelin' 'bout her voice all the time, but yo' ears ain't ter say so trus'wu'thy as yo' eyes. You know what I think, Mr. Peter?"

"What is it Mammy?" Peter was much perturbed about his old friend. Perhaps it would be well for him to marry, but was Mrs. Richards the right woman? True, she was handsome and clever and tactful, but in spite of all these things, Peter was obliged to confess that he never had quite liked her. And why this change of name?

"I tell you what I think," Mammy continued. "I think ev'ything about that woman is a lie, 'cep'in' her face, an' that tells the truf. I know her face am putty an' all that, but that there face tells jes' what kinder pusson she am. It tells she am a liar. If I had a had my eye-sight whin she comed in the fust beginning I could a tol' Doc Andy not ter trus' her, but it's too late now. He done got kinder dependent on her, an' if we go ter him a-bearin tales, he mought up an' marry her or sompen. No, Mr.



Peter, we's gotter play our cyards lak Marse Bob Wallace useter say: 'Play 'em close ter yo' belly.' Now, if I go ter Virginy, Mr. Peter, you mus' kinder keep yo' eye open fer po' Doc Andy. He ain't mo'n a chil' in some ways, an' you an' me is gotter look out fer him. Don't you know she wants ter git me out er the way? Didn't she put that there brandy bottle out an' make out ter Doc Andy that she foun' it thar an' that I had been drinkin'? She's scairt er me, an' she got good reason ter be, but she ain't scairt er you an' I'm a gonter leave matters in yo' han's."

"How does Dr. Dudley feel about her?"

"Lawsamussy, Mr. Peter, Dr. Jim am partiam ter all lady folks. He ain't got no 'scrimination whar they is. That's the onlies' 'jection I see ter Dr. Jim. But, then, they sho do spile him. I reckon it's nachel. He movin' out, he tells me. Done rented a flat er his own." The old woman chuckled. "He say he misses my victuals an he gone got imbergestium from some er the new-fangled messes that there Maud an' Mrs. Richards done made up. He say that I mus'n' tell on him, an' 'cose I ain't, but that their idea of style is ter take the insides out er one thing an' put it in the peelin' of anudder. They mus' stuff the

mattersies wif cowcubbers, an' the cowcubbers wif mattersies, an' whin they cyarn't think of no other way ter disguise the tase what Gawd gib ter a veg'table, they sprinkles nuts over it. Me an' Dr. Jim is useter ol'-fashioned cookin' what stan's on its own bottom."

When Mammy left Peter Roche's office, she felt easier in mind than she had been for many weeks.

## Chapter 23

### DISGUIISING A HOME

Esther was on her way home! Two winters and a summer had passed since she left for school, and now she was coming back. Dr. Wallace was happy at the prospect of having his girl with him again. He had missed her sorely at first, but gradually the sense of loss grew to be less acute. Mrs. Richards and Lucile had seen to it that he was not lonesome. Indeed, he was such a busy man that he had very little time in which to be lonesome.

Matters had not gone quite so well for Mrs. Richards as she had hoped. Long before this she had planned to have brought the timid doctor to declare himself. By this time she expected to be mistress of his home in name as well as in fact. Several times she had fancied he was on the point of some kind of declaration, but each time something had occurred to stop him. Usually it was Peter Roche, who had a way of calling much too often to suit the widow. It almost looked as though the lawyer divined the fact that his friend was in danger.

Mammy, too, continued a thorn in the side. She had made her visit to Virginia, but had not stayed many months. Just when Mrs. Richards began to breathe freely, congratulating herself on the removal of one stumbling block from her path, back came the old woman.

“I knows I ain’t much ’count,” she said to Dr. Wallace, “an’ I ain’t able ter do all yo’ wuck, but I’s still fitten ter do sompen. You done said you’ll gib me a penshum, an’ I been a-thinkin I’d rent me a lil house over in the ward, near the aidge er town, not fur from the cyars, an’ I’ll take in a lil washin’, sech as yo’ shuts an’ Dr. Jim’s — jes’ enough ter keep me from gittin’ too lazy — an’ I mought keep a few hins ter help out wif. I ’low I’ll plant me some laylock an’ vi’lets an’ some portumlacca, cause th’ ain’t nothin lak portumlacca ter put heart in a pusson. All I asks is whin you gib me my penshum, gib it ter me in cash money. I ain’t no han’ ter go to no bank.”

And so Mammy took a little house on the edge of town and there established herself. Dr. Wallace was glad the old woman retired so gracefully from her labors. He had feared she would insist upon coming back as cook and housekeeper. In that case, he would have dreaded the outcome, knowing as he did that

she would never put up with the other servants. As it was, she had a way of pouncing down on them when she made her semi-weekly visits for the doctor's shirts, speaking her mind quite freely about the way they did or did not do their work.

She usually came in the evening, and always insisted upon seeing the doctor. Many times her visits had interrupted a tête-à-tête between Mrs. Richards and the master, much to that lady's chagrin. Everything seemed to work against her in bringing the doctor to a declaration. If it wasn't Peter Roche, it was Mammy, and sometimes even Lucile was dense or hateful (her mother could not decide which) and refused to go to her room after supper, in spite of the meaningful glances cast at her.

And now Esther was coming home! She was to be back for her twentieth birthday. Peter was planning to fill the whole house with tea roses, and Mammy was preparing to bake a huge cake, made of eggs laid by her own hens. Everybody was happy except Mrs. Richards and her daughter, but they deemed it policy to simulate a gaiety they did not feel.

"You are not as clever as you thought," said Lucile. She was alone with her mother after they had retired to their adjoining rooms.



"It seems to me that if you are ever to catch Dr. Wallace, you should do it before the girl comes home."

"Well, if you had not stuck to me like a burr, I might have brought him to the mark this very evening."

"Pooh! Nonsense! I can't run off to my room every evening after supper. I believe Dr. Wallace likes me just as much as he does you, anyhow."

"That is not the question! You are not very clever yourself, or you would have caught Dr. Dudley before this wretched girl gets back."

Lucile flushed painfully, and her mother continued.

"Oh, ho! So that is what is the matter! I wish you joy, my daughter, but I can tell you it is a great mistake. I fell in love with your father — just such another lady killer as Jim Dudley. The way to hold that kind of man is to let him do the loving. Of course, I am not saying that Jim Dudley is an unscrupulous man like your father, but he is like him in that all women adore him. Better nip any feeling in the bud that you may have for him, but catch him if you can."

Dr. Dudley had been very kind and friendly

to both mother and daughter. He felt sorry for them and liked them. They showed him only their best and most charming sides. He had been quite attentive to Lucile. Often he took her to the theatre or brought young men to call on her, and did many little things to make life pleasant for the girl. But only so far and no farther did he go in his friendship. Lucile did everything in her power to be attractive to him, but his attentions always stopped short of any love-making.

"Sometimes I think he is engaged," she said to her mother.

"Nonsense! He is no more engaged than Dr. Wallace. They are just game fish and hard to hook. If one kind of fly does not attract them, we shall have to try another. If all hooks fail, there are still nets to be tried."

"Mother, what do you mean?"

"I simply mean that I do not intend to let my fish escape. You can do as you like about yours. When I get mine safely landed I may be able to help you with yours. In the meantime, remember that 'All is fair in love and war'."

"Do you think Jim could be engaged to this Esther?"

"Of course not! She was nothing more than

a child when she went away — is one still, I fancy. Jim Dudley is simply the kind of man who likes all women but no one woman.”

“What are you going to do when Esther comes home?”

“Put her in the wrong all I can! I am going to be so kind and good to her that she will hate me more than ever. I only hope that foolish old darkey will not tell her that she recognized my voice and knows I am Mrs. Stanley. I am careful to keep away from her, so she does not get a good look at me. I have given orders that she shall never be admitted without being announced, and then I get out of the way. Dr. Wallace thinks I go because of the old woman’s insolence. I have let him understand that that is the reason.”

“I wish you had not changed our name. I can’t see why you did it,” complained Lucile.

“Well, I would have been a fool to settle in this town as Stanley’s wife after the unsavory reputation he had left here. I got along much better as the widow Richards. Honesty is the best policy only so long as it works.”

“But is dishonesty working?” sneered Lucile.

“Oh, I don’t know! We have a roof over our heads and a comfortable home, plenty of

good food, better clothes than we ever have been able to afford before, and besides, strong prospects of being able to establish ourselves — at least I see strong prospects of being able to establish myself. You can judge for yourself what your prospects are.”

Mrs. Richards had one plan for Esther's discomfort which she worked to a nicety. She was determined to make the place as strange to the girl as she could, and so when the news came that Esther was coming home, she immediately suggested to Dr. Wallace that it would be a gentle attention to the returning traveler if he should have the house redecorated. Dr. Wallace, pleased at her thought, gave her *carte blanche* in the matter.

The old house was turned inside-out. Paper-hangers and painters were kept busy for weeks. With a kind of diabolical ingenuity Mrs. Richards managed to alter the place so that it presented an entirely different aspect. Even the green shutters were painted a dun color, and the great lilac bushes trimmed back until they resembled miniature poplar trees. The interior was decorated according to the latest dictates of fashion, and was in a very high key — something she had once heard Esther say she abhorred. The pleasant old rooms, with



their quiet tan walls and dark oak wainscoting, were made gorgeous with light, satin-striped paper and gleaming, white paint. The heavy chandeliers, with their intricate patterns of fern leaves and lilies that had served as models for Esther's early attempts at picture cutting, were regilded until they shone like new. Pictures were re-hung, their positions changed. Some of them Mrs. Richards did not like. These were discarded altogether and stacked up in the attic. Furniture was placed differently. Even the sideboard in the dining-room was moved. Poor Mammy could hardly have found her way around the house now, even with the best of eyesight.

Dr. Wallace was not at all happy in the transformation of his pleasant but rather shabby old home. But his housekeeper was so sure that it would please Esther that he submitted with a good grace to the discomforts of the few weeks that it took to work the wonders. Mrs. Richards kept right behind the decorators, and forced them to hurry with the work. In consequence, everything was finished on time, and the house was placed in apple-pie order for the return of the young traveler. Mrs. Richards prided herself on her efficiency, and well she might.



"I have prepared another room for your daughter," she casually remarked to Dr. Wallace. "The one she used to occupy was small and not nearly so attractive as the front room, the one I have had. I think it is proper that, as the daughter of the house and a grown young lady, she should have the best room in the house."

"Oh, but Mrs. Richards! I would not have you give up your room! And do you think Esther would like to change her room? She has always had the other one. It was near Mammy —"

"Ah, but Mammy is no longer here, and perhaps being near Maud would not be so pleasant. Of course, I am sorry if I have been officious —"

"Not at all, my dear madam!" If there was anything the doctor dreaded, it was hurt feelings, and the thing he had always liked best about Mrs. Richards was that she was not constantly being overcome with feelings. "But I hate to have you put up in a smaller room."

"Oh, you must not think of me! Only think what small quarters I have been accustomed to since my poor dear husband —"

"Yes, yes, but now you must be comfortable. Why do you not take the room Dudley had?"

“ Well, if you insist; then I can put Lucile in the small room near the servant’s room. She would be quite happy there, I am sure. I hope, Dr. Wallace, you will not tell Miss Esther of the improvements we have made in the house when you go to New York to meet her. Let it be as a surprise to her.”

The doctor meekly promised to do as he was bid.

## Chapter 24

### HER JOYFUL ARRIVAL

As Esther tripped down the gangway, Dr. Wallace, standing on the pier, was overcome by a feeling of uncertainty and mystery. It was the same feeling that had come to him on that memorable night almost twenty years before, when Mammy unwrapped the old serge jacket and the folds of blanket that enveloped the little foundling. On that night, he now recalled, his feeling had been one of wonder; and now, as he beheld the beautiful young woman who called him father with so much love and sweetness in her voice, he found himself again wondering. After all, into what manner of woman had the little waif grown?

Truly, she might have sprung from the heart of a tea rose, as he had fancifully told her, when, as a child, she had questioned him as to the mystery of birth. Her daintiness and loveliness had increased with the years, and a gracious poise had joined with her maidenly dignity, giving added grace to her bearing. The bud had opened, and the rose was in bloom.

There was no denying that his little girl had grown into a woman. A kind of shyness seized the doctor as the beautiful young woman in her stylish, brown traveling-suit and becoming furs came tripping down the gangway. Her willful, sun-kissed hair, which refused to stay tucked under the close, brown-velvet toque, had found its way out, and burst into a million little curls and ripples, making a soft glory around the eager young face.

“Daddy, oh, Daddy! I’m so glad to see you! I wondered if you would come to meet me—I might have known you would—you always do the lovely thing—now, tell me, how is Mammy?” punctuated with hugs and kisses. “And Peter—and Jim—and Mike—and everybody?”

Esther had intended to inquire politely concerning the welfare of Mrs. Richards and her daughter, but when she got to them, in her fire of questions, she had trailed off faintly into “and everybody.”

“Fine! Fine! Dudley wanted to come meet you, too, but both of us couldn’t leave. I think he hoped until the last that I would make way for him but—I didn’t. You would rather have had me, wouldn’t you?” He smiled the question at the vivacious girl.

"Why, Daddy, what a question!" The Tea Rose turned into an American Beauty. Dr. Wallace smiled quizzically.

"I told him you would rather see me. As for Mammy, she is growing better every day, and declares, when you come home, she will be well again. Peter is the same old Peter. Mike is the best chauffeur in town, I am sure, and is getting the cars in wonderful trim for your return. Mrs. Richards and her daughter, Lucile, are well and quite — er — er interested in your homecoming." He had almost given away the secret of the old house and the new decorations, but stopped in time. "I hope you will find Lucile congenial, and make a friend and companion of her."

"Oh, yes, that would be charming, I am sure!" faintly.

Esther had determined to be everything that was lovely to her father's housekeeper and her worthy daughter. She had finally talked the matter over with Marian, and the two girls had discussed her unreasonable dislike of the inoffensive Mrs. Richards from all angles. Esther had blamed herself entirely and had resolved to turn over a new leaf. The more practical and less imaginative Marian was an excellent balance-wheel for Esther.



“What did you hate about her?” she had asked.

“I hated the way her nose pinched in at times and the way she stuck her needle in the baby caps.”

Now, this was no reason for hatred in Marian’s philosophy, since poor Mrs. Richards had not made her own nose, and surely a method of sewing was not sufficient grounds for undying dislike.

“Is she after your father?”

“After him — how?”

“Oh, come, now, Esther! After — that is, catching him!” and when Esther still looked mystified, “marrying him, goose!”

“Oh, Marian! How horrid! I never even thought of such a thing. I am sure, while I don’t really like Mrs. Richards, that she would be above anything so — so — out of taste and — and repulsive.”

“But marrying your father would not be repulsive or out of taste, either. Widowers have married before this.”

“Oh, but my father is different! Why, Marian, do you know he adored my mother so that he has never yet been able to speak of her? His sorrow must be just as fresh as it ever was, because he couldn’t even make up his mind to

take me to her grave. She is buried somewhere in New York, or near New York, and when I came here to school, I longed to go to it, but when I got up spunk enough and asked him to tell me where it was, he could not speak. I never saw a face so full of sorrow and misery as his when he looked me in the eyes and then turned away. He simply couldn't trust himself to utter a word."

"He might have written," was Marion's practical suggestion.

"So he might, but I did not like to open up the subject when I found it hurt him so. After all, a grave is nothing, and I know where her lovely spirit is."

And so it was with a chastened heart that Esther was going back to the home where Mrs. Richards reigned supreme. Sometimes Marion's question, "Is she after your father?" would flash through her mind, but she would none of it. It was absurd. Mrs. Richards was a very kind, nice person who had managed to make her father comfortable and lighten his labors. If she had not taken up the house-keeping when Mammy got sick, who could have done it? Surely, thought Esther, only a very unkind daughter would want her poor father to live in discomfort, with his accounts

all mixed up and no one to answer the telephone, just because his own dear daughter did not like a certain lady's nose. She deserved to have her own nose well pinched!

The Carleys also had arranged to meet their daughter in New York, and decided to remain there a few days. Esther and her father were pleased at the turn events had taken, as they both had a thousand interesting things to relate to one another.

As the train sped along with the travelers, taking them as fast as steam and a smooth road-bed could manage back to their southern city, it seemed to Esther that her European trip had been but a dream. The churches and palaces, pictures and statues, were no longer real, no longer so very important. The persons she had met on the steamer and in the various cities where they had stopped long enough to make friends, seemed like characters in a book. The study of art, into which she had plunged with such vim during their stay in Paris, was for the moment forgotten. She could think of nothing but home — home and father! — home and Mammy! — home and Peter! — home and Jim! — dear Jim, whom she put last, as though in duty bound, but who so often came into her thoughts first of all!

She could shut her eyes and see the old house standing high up from the street, with its grassy terrace that she had rolled down so often when a child. The lilacs must be sending forth many leaves by now, and the violets would be in bloom. No doubt the wisteria was beginning to show specks of lavender in its gracefully hanging buds. The green shutters would be stretched wide to let the spring sunshine find its way into every corner of the comfortable, homey old library and parlor.

She thought of the housekeeping games she and Marian had played under the great old lilac bushes. There never were such huge, friendly lilac bushes as theirs. The thick branches bent over and touched the ground, and the floor of their play-house on the turf was always dry except after drenching rains. She decided she would get Daddy to have some benches put under those same bushes. She was too old to play at housekeeping now, but it would be such a nice place to sit and sew and read and dream — especially dream. The thought came to her it would also be a nice place to go to get away from the housekeeper and her daughter, but she pinched her nose viciously to get such a thought out of her head.

Then the picture of the library would flash across her mind's eye — a pleasant low-toned room with its dim old portraits and crowded book-shelves.

“And, oh, my own room! What a joy to get out of hotels and go back to one's own room! I'd rather look out of my little window and see the magnolia tree with its waxy blossoms peeping out from the shiny, dark-green leaves than to behold the whole of Paris from the Eiffel Tower.”

So Esther mused as the train carried her closer and closer to that home she loved so much. Sometimes her thoughts would dwell on Mrs. Richards, but she put that lady out of her mind as much as possible. The conversation she had had with Marian kept coming back to her, but she chose to be amused at such a suggestion. Marry her father, indeed! Absurd!

Home at last! Peter and Jim were standing on the platform to greet them, and Mike was in readiness to load the baggage into the new, spick-and-span car. Peter must be kissed for old time's sake, in spite of the fact that he wouldn't bend over a bit and his face got so red that it did not cool down for hours. Jim Dudley had been all joy and excitement



over the prospect of having his dear little friend home again. But he was not at all prepared for this beautiful young woman, who was not little at all and was nobody's sweetheart for the asking. For once the young man was overcome in the presence of a member of the fair sex. He hung back, abashed like any country bumpkin. He never expected to find himself envying Peter Roche. He might admire and respect the middle-aged bachelor, but never envy him. Now he felt he would give anything just to be Peter — to have this adorable vision in brown, with the rose-petal face and the glory of hair, put her arms around him and kiss him.

They shook hands quite formally, but brown eyes looked into grey, and grey eyes looked into brown, and what they saw seemed to please both colors.

“Princess,” he whispered, “welcome to your kingdom!”

## Chapter 25

### NOTHING THE SAME

“And Mammy — where is Mammy?” cried the girl as the new car responded to Mike’s expert hand. “I’m nearly dead to see Mammy!”

“Mike might go get her as soon as we are landed at home,” suggested Dr. Wallace.

“Oh, let me go, too! I’ll stop long enough to see home, and then I’ll go and get Mammy.” Esther had finally become used to the thought of not having Mammy at home with her, but she was not reconciled to it. Of course, she knew Mammy would not get along with the other servants; knew she was old and crabbed, no doubt; but still she was Mammy, the only mother she had ever known and the only person who would ever talk to her about her mother.

The car stopped in front of the old Grant house. Esther had eagerly noted the landmarks as they sped along the streets. There was the corner where she had turned off so many years to go to school! There was the

drug store where chocolate sodas were most delectable! There the old church stood where she had been christened and where, on so many Sundays, she had gone to sleep religiously, leaning against her father's arm. Now they were in their own street — Garden Street — and now home!

Eagerly she peered from the car, hardly able to wait for Mike to open the door. But he had made a mistake! Stopped at the wrong house! Where were the lilac bushes? Where the wonderful old twisted wisteria vine that had shaded the porch so beautifully? Where were the green shutters through which the light had sifted so softly and pleasantly on hot summer days? Even the violets were gone, dug up and thrown away, while stiff, spaded beds flanked the gravel path that led from the street.

“Oh, Daddy!” was all she could say.

“I hope you like it, dear. Mrs. Richards has taken great pains to get everything ready for you. It was too bad to have to trim the bushes and vines back so far, but she says the florist insisted it must be done to save the shrubs, and the vine was making the parlor damp, so she tells me.”

“And the violets?” faintly — “and the shutters?”

“ Oh, I never thought about the violets! The shutters needed painting badly, and Mrs. Richards thought you would like them done in another color.”

“ Of course!” Esther’s voice sounded so dead that she wondered if it could be hers. She bit her lips violently. She was glad Peter and Jim had left them at the station. They were to come to supper on that evening, her birthday supper, and by that time, maybe, she would feel better about all of these awful changes. Jim must not know how she felt. All of her old hatred of Mrs. Richards was back again in full force.

“ Vandal! Vandal! And she knew I would hate it! She did it on purpose!” her heart cried out.

“ I must leave you now, my dear,” Dr. Wallace said. “ I’ll send the car back for you immediately; Dudley tells me I am wanted badly on some case. Mike can bring in your bags later on.” Esther kissed him. She was glad he was going. She wanted to be alone for a few moments and pull herself together. After all, maybe the woman had thought she was improving things—but the poor lilacs! The poor old twisted vine!

Slowly and sadly she went up the steps.

And so this was her homecoming! She was going up the steps of her home like any visitor. She tried the handle of the door. It was locked. In Mammy's day it was always left unlatched, so she could run in and out without having to ring.

She wondered if Mrs. Richards knew she was standing out there, and if she did, why she did not have the door open and a greeting of welcome for her. She glanced at the parlor windows. The shutters were bowed — not opened wide to let the spring sunshine in, as she had pictured. Through the slats she was conscious of eyes watching her. With a mighty effort at self-control, she took a long breath and rang the bell.

Like any visitor, she was kept waiting for a few minutes; then the door opened and she was ushered into the hall by the very correct maid who answered the bell.

"I am Miss Esther! I'll just go straight to my room."

"But Mrs. Richards said to show you into the parlor. She will be down tereckly," said the girl with a touch of impertinence,— nothing quite tangible but something that Esther was quick to note. For a moment she felt inclined to resent it, but no, she would stick to her



resolve to be gentle and forbearing. She quietly went into the parlor.

Changes, more changes! Gingerly she seated herself on the edge of a chair. The pictures were all moved and hung differently; some of them even gone! Where was the little fanciful painting she had made of her mother when she was only twelve years old? Gone, too! What was her father thinking of? Had he fallen into the clutches of this person so that he even allowed her to take the pictures out of his parlor? And the chandelier, all picked out with shiny gilt! Tears of rage filled her eyes, but she brushed them away as she heard Mrs. Richards descending the stairs.

"How do you do?" was the formal greeting exchanged between the two women, and since both of them had asked it, neither of them answered it.

"I should like to go to my room, please."

"Why, certainly, but would you not like some refreshment after your journey?"

"No, I thank you," she said. "Mike is coming for me in a few minutes, and I should like to go to my room first."

"Your room is all ready for you. I have put you in the front room, over the parlor. I thought you would like the best room in the

house. I consulted your father and he agreed with me."

"Not have my own room! I—I—" Esther choked.

"Of course, now that you are grown and will no doubt make your *début*, it seemed fitting to me that you should have a better room than the one you had occupied. It is very near the servant's quarters and not so desirable as the front room."

"All right!" Again Esther controlled the tears that were burning her eyes.

There was certainly nothing to complain of in the front room. It was a spacious chamber, as clean as clean could be, with a huge, four-posted bed and handsome, heavy furniture. The curtains were stiff and fresh and the place still smelt of new paper and paint. Esther peeped out of the window and her eyes fell on the trimmed lilac bushes and spaded beds.

"They look like new graves," she shuddered. "Ah, there is Mike! Dear Mike, he at least is the same." She opened the window and called down to the chauffeur who drew up his car to the curbing.

"Bring my bags up here, please, Mike, and I'll be right down."

Without a word to Mrs. Richards she flew

down the steps and jumped into the car.

"Let me drive, Mike. I haven't had the wheel for months and months."

"Sure, Miss, and I thought ye would want to see how the new car runs itself," and the delighted Mike made way for her.

"She's on the front seat with the chauffeur," Mrs. Richards remarked to the housemaid who was peeping out of the window. Mrs. Richards had managed to make the servants dread the appearance of the young mistress. She had talked much about the way Mammy had spoiled her and how exacting she was. And then, the turmoil incident to her arrival had naturally thrown much extra work on the servants. This they resented, and laid the blame on Esther.

"Tell me about Cora, Mike — Cora and little Esther."

"Well, Miss Esther, Cora and me are going to get married," blushed the chauffeur.

"Oh, Mike, how splendid!"

"You see, my mother has took such a shine to the kid —"

"Yes, and you took such a shine to Cora. Oh, Mike, I am so glad! When is it to be?"

"We were just awaiting for you to come home."

"Well, I'm here now, thank goodness!"

## Chapter 26

### THE PLAN OF PATIENCE

“ My baby! My lil baby! Oh, you is growed puttier an’ puttier!”

“ More like my mother, Mammy?”

“ P’r’aps! But you still favors yo’sc’f pow’ful much.”

“ Oh, Mammy, it is so lovely to see you. And you are just the same, only you can see better, can’t you, Mammy?”

“ Sho, I kin see wif my eyes as good as you kin, an’ I kin hear wif my years as good as anybody. My ol’ laigs is all that is done gib out. Ifn it hadn’t a been fer these ol’ no ’count laigs, I’d a been standin’ on the flatform ter be the fust ter set eyes on yer.”

“ Well, now you are coming home with me. I simply must see you. Do you know that this is my birthday? I am twenty to-day. I couldn’t have a birthday party without you, Mammy.”

“ Sho I knows it. Ain’t I been a-squeezin my hins ter git aigs ter make a cake fer yer? I wan’t gonter hab no one-two-three cake sea-

soned wif co'ner-sto' vernilla — the kin' yo' paw is had ter eat lately. Cose, that's good ernough fer jes' plain ev'yday, but buthdays is diffunt an' yo' buthday is eben mo' diffunt. No, sir, I wa' termined ter hab a weddin' cake style seasoned wif Frinch brandy an' raised wif the whites er eighteen aigs. Th'ain't no alum powders nor delemterious substance in this hyar cake. It air composed er elbow grease. Thank Gawd, my arms is mo' fitten than my laigs. Ifn I could jes' walk aroun' on my han's, I'd be right spry."

The old woman hobbled to the table, and gently raised the cloth covering the wonderful cake.

"Oh, Mammy, Mammy, what a beauty! Mammy, just give me a teensy pinch, one down underneath! Nobody will know."

"The same baby!" declared Mammy, delightedly. "I almost knowed you'd want a pinch, so I done cooked a teensy extra one fer you'n me, icin' an' all."

The old colored woman and the young white one munched their little cake and looked lovingly at each other. They dared not let themselves mention the subjects that were closest to their hearts, and so they put them off, pretending that time had stood still and the



most important thing in life was the tiny, white-iced cake.

"Have you seen the house and all the — the — improvements, Mammy?" finally ventured Esther.

"No, my chil', I ain't been able ter git over ter the gret house fer quite a spell. It air putty nigh three weeks sence the rheumatiz kinder hit me. I been a-havin lumbago in my knee jints. I been onable ter do my lil washin' here lately. What they been improvin'?"

And then Esther told the old woman of all the cruel changes in her home. Together they wept, Esther for the home, and Mammy for Esther.

"I reckon Mrs. Richards didn't mean no harm. She jes' ain't bawnd ter hairloons. She laks varnishy things what kin be bought in the sto'. I done hear tell she varnished the dinin' room table what air got a polish er generations er Wallaces. She don' mean no harm, honey."

"But my room! What right has she to move me out of my own room? Why, Mammy, I've been dreaming of getting back in my own dear room."

"Ain't she done sayed yo' paw knew it?"

"Yes, but —"

“ Now, chil’ yo’ ol’ Mammy is all kin’ er fools, but she knows some things an’ you listen ter her. Don’t you make no trouble ’bout all these here changes fer yit a while. You jes’ perten’ lak you is pleased.”

“ But how can I?”

“ Sho! You done play-acted a plenty ter know how ter fool her. You perten’ you is the princuss an’ Mrs. Richards is a wicked step-mother or witch or sumpen, an’ you is got a tarsk ter fool her ter save yo’ paw.”

“ All right, Mammy, if you will be my fairy godmother?”

“ Well, the fust thing I is a gonter do is ter tell you that you ain’t called on ter set too much sto’ on changes. They ain’t in nothin’ but ’pearances. You mus’ put yo’ min’ on sompen what cyarn’t change. Yo paw ain’t changed. He lubs you jes’ as much as eber.”

“ But does he, Mammy?”

“ Sho he do! An then Mr. Peter — Mr. Peter ain’t got no mo’ change in him than the mountings. He done come ter stay.”

“ Yes, dear old Peter!”

“ An’ then Dr. Jim Dudley — he — ain’t he the same?”

“ I don’t know. I reckon so.” Esther blushed.

"You knows so. An' as fer the ol' house, why, chil', the house is jes' the same. Paint an' paper cyarn't kill a house. It didn't take many days ter put on the yaller stuff you say Mrs. Richards done choosed, an' it wouldn't take but jes' so many days ter scrape it off an' git it the color you laks. The laylock roots is thar, too, an' will sprout up agin. The ol' twis'ed vime will sen' out shoots too, an' 'fo' you knows it happened, it will be as good as new. An' we kin' plant mo' vi'lets in the ol' places."

"But, Mammy, how can we when you say I must pretend to like it all?"

"Why, chil', that there Mrs. Richards is a-ridin' fer a fall. She's too low-lifed ter prosper long. She done wuck her devilmint putty nigh ter a finish. You jes' bide yo' time lak I done an' wait."

Mike had a more cheerful passenger going than he had coming. Mammy had given her a new outlook. "Things are not so sad after all," thought Esther as she sat by Mammy on the back seat, the precious cake with all its glory of icing held carefully between them.

## Chapter 27

### ESTHER AND JIM

Esther had learned self-control. That fact was proven conclusively when she smiled at Mrs. Richards and thanked her for all the improvements she had made on the house for her sake. She did it in the presence of their guests at the birthday supper. Her father looked pleased, but Jim and Peter looked mystified. They hated the changes, and longed to say how they hated them. Mrs. Richards, who was rather hoping for trouble, intending thereby to put Esther in the wrong, did her best to be gracious, but the white dents came around her nose and her mouth shut very tight. Mammy, who was peeping in at the door, gave a chuckle.

Mammy was taking great delight in annoying Mrs. Richards by looking at her keenly. That lady had been able to avoid Mammy up to this time, but now that Esther had come home, the old woman was privileged to take the place she had formerly had. She was in and out of the dining-room, sometimes assisting the pert maid

to serve. She gazed earnestly at Lucile, too, as though recalling something.

Lucile, in spite of herself, could not help being attracted by Esther. Esther was all loveliness and kindness to the girl.

"She is not responsible for her mother," she said to herself. "Nobody is—not that I'd mind being for my own mother."

Esther's eyes were shining and her color reflected her excitement. She was so gay that nobody at the table dreamed how her heart was beating under the beautiful new Paris gown. Mammy knew, and she shook her head sadly as she peeped from the pantry door.

Mrs. Richards had never seen Esther "carrying on," as Mammy called it, when the girl was so full of spirits that she actually bubbled over. She had always been quiet and reserved in her presence—dull the older woman had thought her. Now her wit sparkled and flashed from person to person. Her charm was like an electric current and brought sparks from everybody with whom it came in contact. Even old Peter arose to the occasion and actually made a pun—the first in his life.

Doctor Jim gazed like one bewitched at the beautiful girl. Her gown was of cloth of gold, that darkened in the folds to the exact color of



her hair. He marveled at the snowy whiteness of her neck and arms. He forgot to eat, and forgot to be pleasant to his neighbor, Lucile. He was oblivious to everything but the fact that Esther was home and that he could hardly wait to get her by herself and tell her how he adored her. Twenty was old enough, surely, he thought. She had been out in the world and had met other men. And by this time, she should know her heart. If he could win her, he would not be taking advantage of her youth and inexperience. If he could! Well, if he failed at first, he could keep on trying. Jim Dudley felt very doubtful of his own desirability as he gazed in the eyes of this golden girl. He had known that she was lovely as a child. He knew also that the day would come when he would tell her of his love, but he could not have known into what a glowing woman that child would grow, nor could he realize that the love he had for the eighteen-year-old girl would turn into a consuming flame.

Would the supper never end? He looked knowingly at Mammy, who was helping to remove the plates. The old woman knew how he felt. He was sure of it, because she seemed to be hurrying the pert maid and the dignified butler, who were more stylish than expeditious in their serving.

“ You alls thinks if you co’ses yo’ victuals, you is did all that is ter be did,” the old woman declared, as she remonstrated with the two servants in the pantry. “ Young folks don’t want ter set all night while you is stylishfyng. You alls b’lieves in mo’ plates than things ter eat off’n ’em. Anybody’d think white folks had pertitions in they innards. I b’lieves in soup plates an’ dinner plates an’ butter plates an’ pie plates — but all of this puttin’ two green peas on a plate an’ snatching it off an’ an’ puttin’ a soggy ’tater on anudder wif a bit of feesh no bigger’n a sick cat could eat, an’ then a takin’ that away, an’ so on, I tell yer ’tain’t our way. No wonder Doc Andy is lookin’ so flabbyfied. He don’t git ’nough ter fill out his hide. All these here lil samples you han’s him ain’t stickin’ ter his ribs. You ain’t called on ter keep a-fillin’ his glass so full, neither.”

“ Over at last! And now, will these people ever let me have a moment with Esther?” thought Jim. Peter looked as though he were there for all night, so fascinated was he by the beauty and charm of his godchild. Esther had given him another kiss when she thanked him for the birthday roses, and at supper she had appeared wearing one in her hair.

Dr. Wallace, who had drunk rather too many

toasts, was in a gay mood and beamed on everybody. As for Jim, were he not descended of a long line of resolute pioneers, who refused to give up no matter how great the odds, he would have left without having that word with Esther that must be spoken — and spoken with no third person present. Mammy finally arranged it for him. She had come to say good-night to her godchild, and by skillful management, made Peter decide to leave for his bachelor quarters on the car that had been ordered out to take her home. Esther went into the hall to bid good-bye again to her two dear friends. When Mammy and Peter had left, the blood of the frontiersman asserted itself and Jim drew her into the library and shut the door.

“At last! I thought it would never be over — but I’m not going to waste time talking about it — there’s too much more to say, and I’d better begin before somebody comes butting in.”

“I think I had better go back to Daddy and — and Mrs. Richards and her daughter,” faltered Esther. There was an ominous shine in Jim’s eyes that suddenly made her feel very young and small and a little scared. “If you will let me pass, please, Jim, dear.”

“Why, Esther, darling, I can’t let you go yet. I’ve been waiting for centuries to say some-

thing to you, and now I simply have to get it out, even if you don't want to listen. Will you listen, Esther?"

"I — I — don't know."

"I could tell you lots better if you sit down. Won't you let me hold your hands?"

"Well, I believe I could listen better if we just sit down and I hold my own hands." She seated herself on the sofa, drawing to one side as Jim seated himself beside her.

Jim remonstrated gently. "I don't see the use, dearest, in putting distance between us. Nothing will ever keep me away from you — except one thing. And you wouldn't say that one thing, would you, dear? Of course, if you have found a new prince, a foreign nobleman or something, I shall have to submit, but you haven't done that, have you?"

"N — o!"

"I know you are mighty young, and, dearest, maybe I ought to let you look around before I tell you this thing I'm going to tell you, but — I — but — suppose you look around and find somebody else, what in the thunder will I do? Why, little girl, I've loved you ever since I saw you sitting in the mulberry tree — ever since you came sweeping into the room and bowed so low I had to help you up. I knew it



all the time, but somehow I never realized how dear you were to me until you went off to school. I have waited and waited for you to come home. But I did not know how beautiful you would be, and now that you are home, I find I love you ten times as much as I thought I did. Oh, Esther, won't you — !”

“Won't I what?” she whispered.

“Won't you be my princess and let me be the prince forever?”

Esther looked at him, her heart in her eyes. She remembered what dear old Mammy had said to her about changes in people being the only thing that mattered. Jim had not changed. His eyes were the same kind, merry ones that had looked into hers when he said, “Rise, princess!” And he loved her and wanted to marry her! Love him? Of course she loved him! She couldn't remember when she hadn't. But now the feeling was different. It wasn't like loving Daddy and Mammy and Peter and Marian. Loving them did not make her all choked up. This new kind of love, the kind she felt for Jim, almost hurt.

He took her hands in his. His voice came to her in accents of languorous softness.

“What did you say, dearest?”

She hung her head. She wanted to tell him



how much she did love him, but the heart that had been beating so wildly under the cloth-of-gold somehow got up in her throat.

“What is it, darling?”

“I — I — Oh, Jim, I wish my mother could be alive!”

“Poor little Esther!” He kissed her hands. Just as he did so, the door opened quickly and Mrs. Richards came into the room.

“Pardon me!” she said, “but Dr. Wallace sent me to suggest that Miss Esther might want to excuse herself and retire, as she had rather a strenuous day.” There was an air of insolent triumph in her bearing of which both Esther and Dr. Dudley were conscious. They gave each other a meek farewell, Jim glancing into the girl's troubled eyes and whispering:

“To-morrow!”

## Chapter 28

### SETTING A TRAP

Andrew Wallace could not get it straight in his own mind how the thing had come to pass — how he, most bashful and reserved of men, had been discovered by Lucile Richards with his arms around her mother.

He remembered quite well that he had drunk several toasts in honor of Esther's birthday and in consequence had felt quite cheerful and lively. Champagne always made him forget his bashfulness. He remembered that the party had gone into the parlor together and that Peter had made a pun — quite a funny pun. But he could not recall it. Of course, the funniest part of the pun was that old Peter had made it. Mammy had come in, and he remembered telling her he would have her pension ready for her on the morrow — cash money and no checks — and she had said she would come over on the trolley. Then he remembered that everybody had left the room except Mrs. Richards. She had sunk down in a chair and said that she was tired. He had asked her if he could get her anything, and she

had suggested that perhaps a bit of champagne might help her — she had not taken any at dinner. There was one bottle left on ice. She would fetch it, she said.

“Won't you drink with me?” she had asked in a kind and friendly tone. No doubt the poor woman had overworked herself preparing the birthday supper. He had said yes, and together they finished the bottle.

Then without warning she had put her head down on the arm of her chair and burst into tears. Her shoulders were shaking with sobs. She could not speak, but had motioned him to leave her. Of course he could not do that. She might be ill. He bent over her, patting her on the back and begging her to let him do something for her. He could not swear to it, but his impression was that she had raised herself up out of her chair and he had assisted her. How he got his arms around her was a mystery, but around her they were, and at that moment Lucile entered the room.

He could not remember exactly what had happened after that. He had a faint idea that Lucile had kissed her mother and shaken hands with him. Why, he did not know. It seemed strange that a young woman who lived in his house and with whom he had just supped and

spent the evening should be shaking hands with him. This matter of handshaking was worrying him more than anything else as he lay in his bed the morning after the birthday party. Why should Lucile kiss her mother? He could not remember having seen her do so before, even when the girl went off to her office in the morning. They did not seem to be a very affectionate pair. Esther was always kissing him, but Esther was such a loving child.

What an old fool he was to have drunk so much champagne. His head felt like old times — before Esther came into his life. He had not had too much to drink for twenty years. Champagne had usually been served on Esther's birthday, but never more than was required to drink to many happy returns of the day. The butler must have kept his glass filled without his realizing it.

A cold bath restored him somewhat, but the behavior of his housekeeper and her daughter still puzzled him. He wished he had a cup of Mammy's coffee. In the old days she used to bring it to his bed-side, those youthful days before his mascot came to live with him, when it was the usual thing for him to drink too much at night and have a headache the following morning. He could recall how sad her kindly

brown face would look as she handed him the coffee. What good coffee it always was, too! Maud's coffee was either strong and muddy, with a bitter taste, or weak and watery. She never seemed to strike the happy medium. He had not liked to complain to Mrs. Richards. She tried so hard to have everything nice, and no doubt it would have hurt her feelings to have him find fault. He wondered why she herself did not notice how poor the coffee was.

What in the deuce had the woman cried about? He hated to see women cry. Well, no doubt the poor woman regretted the occurrence too. Such an invaluable office attendant, he reflected, must hate herself for having indulged in the feminine weakness of tears. Another time he must be careful and not be too sympathetic. She might not understand. He heartily hoped there would not be another time. He wondered how long it would take Esther to learn how to keep house. Mammy might take her in charge and show her. He hoped she would not lean towards so many fancy dishes.

He decided not to eat any breakfast. The thought of what Maud would serve him was abhorrent. A cup of strong coffee at a restaurant would set him on his feet again, and doubtless poor Mrs. Richards would be relieved at his



absence, after having been so foolish as to weep in his arms the night before. He ordered the car and was gone before the ladies of the household were stirring.

The angel of sleep had not dealt very kindly with those ladies during the night, and now that morning had come, all three of them were trying to make up for the wakeful hours they had spent. Esther had been too happy and excited to sleep. She was sorry not to be in her own bed in her own room. To dream of Jim there would have been far sweeter. On the other hand it was fun to woo sleep for the first time in the guest chamber. One could amuse one's self, after the manner of girls sleeping in a strange room, by naming the four corners for four men friends. In the morning one was sure to laugh when one woke up, glanced at the corner one was facing, and ascertained the man one was sure to marry.

Lucile could not sleep for weeping. How she hated herself! The evening had been one of torture to her—the torture of watching the love-light in the eyes of Jim Dudley. But the light did not shine for her, as she so ardently had hoped it might. It burned for Esther — Esther, who had everything and whom everybody loved. Peter and Mammy had just left when Lucile

had seen Dr. Dudley lead Esther into the library and shut the door. She had rushed up to her room for the storm of tears she felt was coming. Before she had quite wept herself out, her mother had knocked hurriedly on her door, commanding her to open it and listen to her. With a heart full of bitterness she had consented to be a party to the fraud her mother was about to perpetrate on their kind and generous host. Her part was to stand in the hall until given a signal from her mother; then she was to enter the parlor. She quickly perceived that Dr. Wallace had been drinking too much to know what he was doing, or to take in the fact that she was congratulating him on his having won the heart of her mother. She wondered if he remembered anything at all about it, or if her mother would be forced to remind him of what had passed between them. All that had passed had been a few kindly, maudlin words from the physician, who was trying to comfort a lady in distress, and then when the signal came and Lucile had entered, she found her mother locked in his arms as he swayed unsteadily on his feet.

“It was a low thing to do! Don't speak to me!” she had exclaimed when her mother followed her to her room to talk things over.

“Ah, you are cross because you are not so

clever," sneered the older woman. "I interrupted a very pretty scene between Esther and your friend a moment ago. I am afraid it is all up between you two unless something occurs to intervene."

"I don't want anything to occur! I am sick of all of this intrigue."

"Well, well! Go to bed, child, and you will feel better about it in the morning. I am certainly obliged to you for helping me out. I'll do the same for you if I get the chance."

Mrs. Richards went to her room humming a little tune. How happy she was! The hard times were over for her. Perhaps she would spend the rest of her life in affluence. How fortunate that Dr. Wallace was such a gentleman! Even if he had been too deep in his potions to know what was going on, the slightest reminder would be all that was necessary. He would be the last man on earth to try to crawl out of an engagement, even if he had been insensible of making it. She would straighten it all out on the morrow. In the meantime, sleep! But sleep was not for her, either. Plans and plans and more plans crowded through her brain.

Esther was the most difficult problem to attend to. Maybe it would be wiser to encourage the match between her and Dr. Dudley, as that

would make things much simpler for them all. Poor Lucile! It was too bad. If it could be managed differently she would do it. It was a pity to allow such a desirable prospect to escape.

“And how I do hate the minx!” she exclaimed. “I’d like to hurt her — and that old nigger, too!”

## Chapter 29

### A PATIENT'S IDENTITY

Bright and early Mrs. Richards was in the office. She looked as fresh and clean as a lily in her spotless white linen dress. She was irritated that Lucile should have come to breakfast with heavy eyes and a sullen expression. Could it be that the girl was not going to play the game? It was a relief to learn that the doctor had gone off on an early call, as she did not want him to see Lucile. She was also pleased that Esther had decided to breakfast in her room.

She needed the time to think and plan. Lucile had dragged herself off to work, and Esther, no doubt, would not appear for hours, as she had much unpacking to do. Mike came with a message from Dr. Wallace, who gave a list of his calls for the morning in case he should be needed. A sealed envelope containing Mammy's pension was also sent. Dr. Wallace always saw to it that his faithful old servant had this pension exactly on time, and it was always in crisp new bills, as Mammy would have naught to do with banks and checks.



The bell rang. She heard a man asking in a husky voice for the doctor.

"He won't be in for an hour," the butler answered.

"I'll come in and wait."

What a bore to have a patient sitting around the office for a whole hour, especially when she had so much to think about, and bills to make out besides! The man was ushered in by the butler. With a curt nod in his direction, but without looking at him, she went on with her work. The patient seated himself where he could take in the clean-cut profile of the white-clad figure. He gazed at her attentively as she bent over her orderly desk.

"Aren't you going to speak to me, Lou?"

For a moment her heart stopped beating, and then it hammered so violently that she was forced to put her hand on it to still its clamor.

"Dick Stanley!" she gasped. "What do you want?"

"I want about everything a man can want. First, I'd like a kiss. Don't look so disgusted! I know I'm pretty seedy, but I'm clean enough. A man's own wife might put up with a little seediness. You are my own wife, you know." He came towards her.

"Don't touch me, you brute!"

"Oh, come now, I'm not such a brute! You left me before I left you. Neither one of us is an angel. I say, old girl, you have remained deucedly handsome. What are you doing here in Andrew Wallace's home? I never was more surprised."

"Oh, you did not come here to see me then?" in a relieved tone. "You did not know I was here?"

"How should I? I came to see Wallace for auld lang syne, hoping to get a little cash out of him. I hear he has prospered. I fancy you are in his hire, and must know. What does he make a year?"

"None of your business!"

"Oh, don't be so strict with me, Lou! I swear I am not going to bother you. Let's be friends. What's your grouch?"

"Grouch, indeed! Here I have struggled along to take care of myself and Lucile — that's Lucy, I call her Lucile now —"

"More stylish, eh? Tell me about the kid!"

"Well, I have taken care of the both of us, and now that she is on her feet and I am beginning to see some chance of establishing myself, here you come along — don't touch me, I say! I hate you! I wish I had divorced you twenty years ago."

"Well, why didn't you?"

"I would have if I thought there was any chance of your ever turning up again."

"I tell you I won't trouble you! Does Wallace know you are the wife of his old poker companion?"

"No, I call myself Mrs. Richards. He thinks I am a widow."

"Is Wallace still a bachelor?"

"Oh, no, a widower. He has a daughter who was twenty yesterday. His wife died when she was born."

"That's funny. It was just about twenty years ago that I left this burg and he was supposed to be a bachelor then. I remember the last night we had a little game, a terribly windy, rainy night in March. Wallace had a run of luck that wiped me out — it was that night that some woman left a baby on his doorstep. I remember I guyed him by suggesting it was his. Of course, I knew it wasn't — we all knew that Wallace's middle name was Joseph — but it made the old nigger cook madder than hops. I wonder what he did with the kid. Just like him to keep it."

"Was it a girl?" inquired the woman, excitedly.

"Yes! It was all wrapped up in an old serge

jacket, and there was an envelope of patterns and some white thin stuff in the bundle. I remember it quite well. A guy named Peter Roche was here, too."

"Do you know, Dick, I'm almost glad you have come back? I can do a lot for you if you will promise to keep yourself hidden. Dr. Wallace does make a tremendous income, and if all goes well, I can control it. You will have to help me, though."

"Help you! How?"

"Help me by keeping out of the way!"

"Hump! I have been helping you for more than twenty years!" He laughed. "What's your game?"

"I am going to marry Andrew Wallace, and I'll see to it that you spend the rest of your days in comfort."

"That's a dangerous game, old girl. Suppose I object."

"That's nonsense. You don't care a rap. There is no use in pretending you do."

"You always were a cold one. That's one reason I —"

"Never mind all that! Nobody knows I am Mrs. Stanley, and if anyone did, what difference would it make so long as you don't make your appearance? You look pretty down-and-out —"

hardly fit to make a living — and here I offer you a place on Easy Street. All you have to do is disappear again.”

“But I must see little Lucy first.”

“That’s just what you mustn’t do — at least not for a long time. The girl is fully capable of making a fool of herself.”

“I’m glad of that. A woman ought to be capable of making a fool of herself on occasion. It’s more human. But I came to see Wallace, hoping for a small loan. I’m dead broke. Just got to this city last night and have not yet had my breakfast.”

“I haven’t any change in the house — only a few cents. But I can give you a check.” She thought rapidly. A check might lead to the identification of this husband whom she wanted to disappear. There was Mammy’s money! Why not give him that? She could put the old woman off until she could get the cash for her.

“Here, take this! There is enough here to keep you in comfort for quite a while. Now, go! Don’t come here, for goodness sake! Write to me, if you must, but don’t come. Remember my name is Mrs. Richards.”

He left, and she watched him as he walked up the street. Was this the man she had once loved — this broken, middle-aged roué? Ah,



well! There was no time for sentimentalizing. There was work to be done. She called the housemaid and told her to answer the office telephone; then with a triumphant smile on her face she mounted the stairs and tapped at Esther's door.

## Chapter 30

### THE UNBELIEVABLE STORY

A sorry, little figure, wretchedness written into every outline, Esther stood in the middle of her room, her open trunks, half unpacked, lying all around her, and her pretty clothes scattered over bed and chairs. Was she asleep — had she dreamed all the terrible things that Mrs. Richards had just been telling her? Was she Esther Wallace or was she not? Mrs. Richards said not — that she was a foundling, nameless, living on the charity of Dr. Wallace.

That was terrible — unbelievable! But no, not so terrible as the other thing the woman had mentioned. She had said that she was to marry her daddy! Her daddy — her own dear daddy? No, that couldn't be. There must be some mistake. Her heart cried out against the thought. Lies — lies — they must be lies! Her daddy would not send this heartless woman to tell her this terrible thing about her birth! And what was it she had said about Jim — dear Jim, who was all but her's? A selfish crime for her to marry Jim! How ridiculous! Ruin his career —

pull him to the dust — those were the phrases that had been thrown at her. What did these things mean? The woman had said that Jim would never have spoken to her of love if he had known that she was a foundling.

A torrent of sobs overcame the little, dejected figure. And then the thought came of her mother — the mother of whom she had dreamed so often. Was all that a lie, too? Was her mother none of the beautiful things she had thought her to be? Was her love for her all based on a lie? Had her whole life and happiness been built upon an untruth? And Mammy — was Mammy a liar, too, with all her wonderful tales of her mother's golden hair and blue, blue eyes, her beautiful nature and tidy habits? And what about her father's devotion to his young wife; his grief over her death — so sharp that he never could speak of her? Were these all lies?

What was she to do? She couldn't stay in the house with all of these people who hated her. Mrs. Richards hated her, or she could not have told her those terrible things — even if they were true. Her father no longer loved her, or he would not have had a stranger tell her that she was not his own child. He might have felt that she must know about it, but if he loved her, even

the least bit, he would have put his arms around her and gently and tenderly told her the truth. Softened by love, the truth might not have been so horrible.

Jim loved her, but when he knew about her, he would be sorry he had told his love. Thank God, she had not had a chance to answer his question with the fatal word that lay in her heart and eyes and trembled on her lips. She would not ruin his career for worlds.

"I'll go to Mammy!" she cried. "Mammy can tell me the truth. Mammy loves me no matter what I am."

She piled the pretty clothes back in the boxes and trunks.

"I'll have to take some clothes, but only enough to keep me decent until I can earn my living. Lucile can have all these," she thought, bitterly. "I wonder if she hates me, too."

"I mustn't take this suitcase. It's too handsome. There's one up in the attic that will do."

Quickly she climbed the attic stairs. Mrs. Richards' energy had not extended to the attic. It was the one place in the house that had remained untouched by her efficiency. The trunks stood against the wall as of yore and broken chairs and tables were piled up in the corner. There stood the old valise. There was

the chest with the costumes for tableaux. She opened it. The queen's crown, crushed and out of shape, was on top.

"Poor little queen!" she sighed, straightening out the tinsel points.

There was also an old trunk in which Mammy kept odds and ends. It was open. Evidently Mrs. Richards had piled a lot of things in it when she had re-decorated the house — things she had decided were of no value.

Sticking out from this pile, Esther saw the frame of the picture she had painted and presented to her father on her twelfth birthday. She pulled it out.

"Poor Mother! Poor little imaginary Mother! I am going to take you with me. I wonder what else is in this trunk."

She laughed and cried over the soiled shelf-papers, with their wonderful friezes of birds, beasts and fairy queens. Mammy had saved them all. Dear Mammy! What was this? An old blue-serge jacket! Whose was it? Not Mammy's — she always wore black and it was too small for Mammy besides. Esther slipped it on. It just fitted. Could it be the very jacket she had come wrapped in? Mrs. Richards had spoken of an old serge jacket. Maybe the envelope of patterns was there, too. In the next



handful, it came to light, wrapped in some bits of yellowing cloth.

"Baby's first clothes," she read on the envelope. There was a picture of a round-cheeked baby dressed in all its finery and on the back a mysterious chart showing how to cut the most clothes from the least cloth. "Poor little Mother! You are not imaginary any more. You are real. You are real, and I believe you loved me. You love me still!"

Still wearing the jacket, and with her treasures clasped in her arms, Esther flew back to her room. It wasn't such a bad-looking little jacket when it was smoothed out. It had rather a jaunty air.

"I am going to wear it when I leave. This, at least, I am entitled to. This is the tea rose I came from — this little, old jacket!" she cried.

Rapidly she packed the old valise, putting in only the simplest and most indispensable articles. She crept downstairs, the shabby suit-case quite weighting her down. Without meeting anyone she slipped out the back door. Mike was in the garage rubbing up the new car. He looked up, grinning, pleased to have a visit from the little mistress.

"Mike, will you do something for me?"

"Sure, Miss, anything under hiven!"

“Will you take me somewhere and never tell a soul where I have gone?”

“Sure! You wouldn’t be asking me if it wasn’t right!” and Mike jumped in his car and skillfully backed it out of the garage. He was somewhat mystified at the appearance of the young mistress. The shabby blue jacket and battered hat did not look like one of the elaborate Parisian outfits she was supposed to have brought back with her. And the old valise was certainly not the one that he had brought from the station.

“Take me to Mammy, Mike. And remember, never tell!”

But when she arrived, Mammy was not at home. Esther knocked first at the front door and then the rear; then went all the way around the little whitewashed cottage into the wood-shed, and even into the chicken house, scaring a big blue hen off her nest before she had laid her daily egg.

“She’s not here, Mike, but I’ll just wait,” she called. “Now, remember, you are not to tell anyone that you brought me here.”

“Yes, Miss! Shall I come back for you?”

“No, I thank you, Mike. You are very good to me. Good-bye, Mike. My best love to Cora and little Esther.”

## Chapter 31

### ESTHER LEARNS THE TRUTH

Mammy had started on her way to Dr. Wallace's at an early hour. She had planned to help Esther unpack and put away her things. Besides, it was the day for her pension, and she was as regular about drawing her pension as about everything else. Once a month she would arrive, and each time would find that the doctor had left it for her in crisp new bills in a sealed envelope. She had another reason for hurrying over, and that was that she too had seen the love-light in Jim Dudley's eyes, and she felt sure Esther would have something to tell her.

"My lamb, my lamb!" she muttered as she walked along the street, after alighting from the trolley. "She was as booful as the day las' night an' Dr. Dudley looked lak he gonter eat her up. If it come ter pass lak I see it a-doin', I'll die happy."

"Whe'fo' you all time talkin' 'bout dyin'?" Mammy's second voice now came into play. "I gon ter lib mebbe ter rock anudder cradle. They's a plenty er spunk lef' in me yit."

“Hi, somebody a-comin out er the gre’t house,” she remarked as she turned the corner. “Doc Andy is got mo’ praxis than anybody in town, I hearn.”

“Look lak I done seed that there man befo’. Sence I got my eyesight back I sho kin see fur up the street. He got on a red necktie, too. I wan’t never no hand fur red neckties on gemmans, ’less’n the red air kinder quietfied an’ the gemman air refimed ’nough ter carry it off.”

The man and Mammy met and passed one another. He paid no attention to the old woman. He was occupied in counting a roll of crisp new bills which he had taken from an envelope, carelessly throwing the envelope on the ground. Mammy eyed him closely.

“Twenty year ain’t improved you none,” she mumbled after he had passed her and turned the corner, “but it ain’t changed you much either. You air the same Stanley, only broader an’ squatter an’ blacker. I sho am tickled I done comed along this street at this time. You air still keerless, too, a-making dirt wherever you goes an’ throwin’ papers in front er Doc Andy’s house.”

She stopped and picked up the envelope. Plainly written on it in the doctor’s hand was “Mammy’s Pension.”

"Umhum! You done been in ter see yo' lubly wife an' she air payin' you ter keep yo' mouf shet wif ol' 'Ria Johnson's money. This here air business fur Mr. Peter. I reckon my baby'll hab ter fol' up her own putties this mornin' 'cause her Mammy air got business wif Jedge Roche."

Peter Roche was a very busy lawyer, but he let it be understood that nobody must disturb him while he and Mammy had their long confidential talk.

"Wallace is a fool, Mammy, a fool! He was drinking too much champagne last night, too. That woman saw to it that his glass was kept filled. She is after him tooth and nail, but thank God, this disreputable husband of hers is back at last! I intend to tell Wallace this very day all about her. I have got her past all ticketed. The report has just been handed in this very morning." He reached for a packet of papers in a pigeon-hole marked "R." "She is a sly one," he continued, "but detectives are still more so. She is not fit to be in the house with Esther."

"But, Mr. Peter, that there Stanley was there the night my baby lamb was lef' on our do' step. S'posin', only s'posin', he up an' tells Mrs. Richards about it! She is jes' low-lifed enough ter go tell Esther. Oh, my baby, my baby!"

"You had better go quickly and stay with



Esther all you can. Make some excuse to be with her every minute until this woman is out of the way. Poor little thing! There is no use in her ever knowing the truth."

A taxi was called and Mammy sent to Dr. Wallace's post-haste.

"Humph! Stylish this mornin'!" was the housemaid's saucy greeting as Mammy alighted. The girl was sweeping off the sidewalk.

"You air moughty late a-sweepin' off the front," the old woman remarked, as she pushed past the broom which the girl held in the path.

"Mrs. Richards tol' me to say to you that Dr. Wallace ain't see fit to give you yo' pension to-day. You'll have to come to-morrow."

"All right," was the ominously meek acceptance of this. "I'll jes' go on up an' see Miss Esther."

"She done gone."

"Gone whar?"

"Th'aint no tellin'. I seed her draggin' a ol' suitcase out to the garage, an' she hopped in the big car an' the shover took her off. He done come back without her an' he ain't a-sayin' whar he done took her."

"Air Doc Andy in?"

"No! He air spected in at leven."

"An' Mr. Mike—whar he?"

"He done gone ter shove the doctor aroun'."

"Air Dr. Dudley been here this mornin'?"

"He done comed an' gone. He asked fur Miss Esther. Mrs. Richards seed him an' I don't know what she done tol' him, but he went off lookin' kinder puzzled lak an' pale 'roun' the gills. He flung hisse'f in his car and buzzed off."

Without a word Mammy turned on her heel and walked off.

"That chil' air gone ter me. I's as sho of it as I's bawn. Ain't I her fairy godmother?"

She found Esther seated on her doorstep, her shabby valise at her feet. Without a word the old woman opened the door and ushered her into her clean front room. She took the valise from her unresisting hands and drew off the old serge jacket. Tenderly she lifted the battered hat from the curly head; then she seated herself in a low chair and drew the girl down into her lap. There were no tears left to shed, but Esther put her face against the old woman's faithful bosom and wished with all her heart that she was dead.

"Mammy knows all about it, honey; she knows. She knows that that wicked woman done tol' her baby something to make her miserable, an' her baby up an' packed her bag an' comed

straight ter her Mammy. Ain't it the truf?"

Esther nodded her head. She could not trust herself to speak.

"Cyarn't you tell yo' Mammy all 'bout it?"

It all came out, finally, in faint jerky whispers. Mammy listened intently, her face set like a piece of bronze. When she heard that Mrs. Richards had announced her intention of marrying Dr. Wallace, she snorted disdainfully.

"What time wa' it whin she made sich a 'nouncement?"

"Nine o'clock exactly! I remember my little traveling clock chimed while she was in my room. To think, Mammy, it was only two hours ago! It seems like a whole life-time to me."

"Nine o'clock! Well, if that don't beat Bob's tail!" the old woman laughed. "Ain't she one she debble?"

"But, Mammy, I can't see anything to laugh about."

"No more would I if'n I hadn't a happened ter see Mrs. Richards' own wedded husban' a-coming up the street at nine o'clock percisely. She ain't let no grass grow under her feet. That there man what is her husban' (an' his name is Stanley an' not Richards) is the only pusson what knowed about the time you comed ter us as a lil' baby chil'. We done hoped he wa' dead

an' gone, but he done tu'ned up, an' sho as shoot-in', he air tol' his wife about it an' she done made out the doctor tol' her — the hellcat what she air! Doc Andy don't know nothin' 'tall 'bout her being Mrs. Stanley, an' he ain't no mo' tol' her 'bout you not bein' his own flesh an' blood than he air asked her ter marry him. Doc Andy done drunk too much las' night an' he wa'n't 'sponsible. I done tol' that proudified butler time an' agin not ter be so spry a-filling his glass. Now, baby, I knows well 'nough you is a-blamin' me an' a-blamin' po' Doc Andy fer a-lyin' ter you all these years, an' maybe we is ter blame an' maybe we is done right. Right or wrong, I ain't sorry I done what I done."

She held Esther close in her arms as she spoke.

"Th'ain't nobody ter blame but me. Doc Andy ain't never lied outright. You 'member how he jes' kep' his mouf shet when the subjec' of his wife comed up. I done all the lyin', an' I done it the bes' I could. Whin I started out in the fust beginning I didn't lie no mo'n jes' enough ter make it soun' lak the truf, but arfter I got a-goin', I mus' say I took a kind er pleasure in stancifyin' my tale. It wa' my notion in the fust beginning ter make up a dead wife fer the doctor, an' I tol' him then I'd do all the dirty wuck an' I done it. I wa'n't a-goin' ter hav



you a-growin' up 'thout no name nor nothin'. Do you 'member one time you comed from school a-tellin' a tale 'bout a lil' gal named 'Melia what wa' 'dopted out of a home fer founlin's?"

"Yes, Mammy, I remember. She stole things and all the girls said it was because she had inherited bad ways from her mother."

"Zactly! Now I wa'n't goin' ter hab folks a-lookin' out fer tricks ter crop out in you an' hab you a-hangin' yo' haid. I knowed that when you got growed up an tu'ned out ter be the angel you wa' gonter be, no matter what comed up, I knowed you'd be you — an' you air as good as you air booful, an' th'aint nobody what kin take it away from you. You knows right from wrong, an' you ain't 'sponsible ter nobody but yo' own se'f fer yo' havior. As fer me, I been a-lyin' systematic fer twenty year, but 'fo' Gawd, this lyin' what I been a-doin' wa' mos' lak' prayin'. I won't say I didn't kinder enjy it. I got so's yo' lil mother wa' as real ter me as she wa' ter you. Sometimes I used ter kinder think she wa' whisperin' in my ear what ter say ter you. Her sperit is a-watchin' over you, my lamb, an' she ain't a-blamin' yo' ol' black Mammy fer what she done. I knows you is feelin' wuss about yo' mother than anything else, 'cause you been a-settin' sech sto' on what you been a-dreamin' 'bout



her, but, honey baby, you ain't got no cause ter feel bad about her. Who's ter say we ain't a-been dreamin' true dreams 'bout her? She wa' putty, 'cause how come you so if she wa'n't? An' she wa' good, too — I am sho she wa' good. What do we know to the comtrary? You is good an' you is jes' as apt ter 'herit goodness as puttinness. You wa' allus jes' nachelly good an' you wa' allus jes' nachelly healthy. We don't know nothin' 'bout what made her feel lak leavin' you whar she lef' you, but we mus' keep on a-lovin' her an' thinkin' the bes' 'bout her, an' whin we pass beyon' the pearly gatés, we will meet her an' she kin tell us all we ought ter know. Now, my baby lamb, I don't want you ter blame yo' paw fer nothin'. You kin blâme me all you want ter — you kin blame me an' call me a ol' black liar — you kin leave me an' nebber speak ter me agin fer deceibin' you all these years. No matter what you do or think, I ain't a-regrettin' what I done. I fixed it so you'd have a happy time whilst you wa' a chil', an' I took my chanct on yo' nebber knowing the truf. But now that you knows it, I feels lak you is got stren'th ter bear it. As fer Dr. Jim, why chil', don't you know that ol' hellyon air arfter him fer her own gal? She done foun' out he air got prop'ty out in Kaintuck an' she 'low she better keep him

in de fambly. He air been politeful ter the gal an' got her a-thinkin' 'bout him. Dr. Jim ain't studyin' 'bout nobody but my baby lamb. He ain't a-carin' how you got inter this here worl'. He's so glad you air here an' air what you air that he ain't a-worryin' his haid 'bout no do'staps nor nothin'. I ain't a-sayin' you ought'n ter tell him about it an' let him do his own answerin', but I'm a-knowin what he'll say."

"Oh, Mammy, you are such a wonderful fairy godmother! Already I feel better about everything. I don't believe Daddy did tell her about me. That hurt me as much as anything. But, Mammy, I am going to stay with you for a while. I can't go back home while Mrs. Richards is there. Maybe she will go on staying."

"No, she won't, honey; that I knows. You cyarn't stay wif me 'cause white folks ain't 'lowed ter come stop whar niggers lib. This hyar seg-remgation 'rangement done made it wrong fer white folks ter move in wha mos'ly black folks is habitatin'. Co'se, all my neighbors over hyar in the ward is black, an' so you won't be 'lowed ter stop wif yo' Mammy. You kin spen' the day an' res' yo'se'f, but if you don't go home, we'll hab ter fin' a bo'din' house fer you. But now I's got a lil shoppin' ter do, an' I's gonter leab you ter yo'se'f a bit."

"Oh, Mammy, let me go with you! You and I haven't shopped together for so long."

"Now, baby, you jes' stay on here an' res' yo'se'f. I'll be back fo' ve'y long. Don't let no wolf come git you while I'm gone — lak they done in the story when the ol' nanny-goat wint ter the sto'. You stay an' keep house fer Mammy. You kin make a lil pull candy if you's a min'."

Esther smiled. Would Mammy ever get over treating her like a little child, she wondered?

"I believe I'll lie down on your sofa and take a nap — right here by the window. I don't know what makes me so tired."

Mammy covered her up with her best quilt, the self-same one she had used on the baby Esther, and crept softly from the room.

## Chapter 32

### CLEARING THE ATMOSPHERE

For the second time that morning, Mammy boarded the trolley.

“All this hyar jumpin’ roun’ is a limberin’ my jints. I reckon I’ll pay fer it come night-fall, but I got some wuck ter do fer my white folks an’ I got ter keep a-goin fer a spell.”

Peter Roche had been trying his hardest to get into communication with Dr. Wallace during the morning, but he missed him at every turn. He had hoped to reach his old friend and divulge what he had learned about his office attendant before the doctor should get back to his home to keep the eleven-to-twelve office hour, but in this he was unsuccessful. Peter decided he would have to go to the Grant house and take his chances on seeing the doctor alone in his office after the hour.

Twelve o’clock struck. The last patient had gone, and Dr. Wallace sank back in his chair exhausted. He wished Mrs. Richards would go on about her business and not hover around him so. What was the woman after? She seemed

to be entirely different from the person who had been such a help to him.

"Where is Esther?" he asked.

"She left the house early this morning and has not returned."

"Where did she go?"

"I do not know. The chauffeur perhaps can tell you."

He rang the bell for Mike, who came quickly.

"Mike, where did you take Miss Esther?"

"She asked me not to be tellin' anywan."

"Absurd! Where did you take her?"

Mike said nothing, but his face grew crimson and he stood twirling his cap. The doctor looked at him as sternly as he knew how to look, but Dr. Wallace did not excell in looking stern.

"Why did she go anywhere? When will she come back?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Don't know! What did she say?"

"Nawthin', sir!"

"Mike, I must know where my daughter is."

"Yes, sir!"

"Why don't you tell me where you took her?"

"I have told you, sir, that I promised her not to tell."

"Then you may go!" stormed his master. Mike turned on his heel and left the room.



“What can be the matter with Esther?” he said, turning helplessly to Mrs. Richards.

“She had a suitcase with her, but your daughter has never treated me with any respect or confidence, so I could not ask her where she was going. I felt that it was not yet any of my business.” She put a slight accent on the “yet.” The doctor looked at her in a dazed way.

“The truth of the matter is that Esther is jealous of me and of Lucile.”

“Jealous! Why?”

“I felt that it was only right to tell her of what occurred last night, and she was very angry.”

“What occurred?”

“And have you so soon forgotten?”

“Forgotten what? What did occur?”

“Why, my dear Dr. Wallace, right in the parlor you asked me to be your wife and I accepted.” Her manner was coy, but the ominous white dents were visible around her nose.

“My dear madam—” Dr. Wallace could only gasp.

“My daughter came in and found you with your arms around me. Surely, you cannot say that you do not remember. It has meant so much to me to know that all of my loneliness

is at an end." Here she began to whimper, holding her handkerchief to her eyes.

"My God!" was all Dr. Wallace could say. Had he really been so foolish as to do this terrible thing, he asked himself. He could remember having his arms around her, but how they got there he did not know. It was all because of that champagne. He couldn't remember saying a word about love or marriage. And this woman had gone and told Esther, and she had gone off somewhere! Maybe Mammy would know where. He must send for Mammy. In the meantime, he felt that he hated his office assistant. Marry her! He'd rather die. Why, she wasn't even a real lady. He realized it now for the first time. Would a real lady have taken advantage of a drunken man? He was drunk; he must have been.

He sat and looked at her helplessly while she sniffed in her handkerchief. Then he began to wonder if she would not take a sum of money and call it off. She couldn't have any real feeling for him. It wasn't possible. He would see Peter and get him to take the matter up. But what a humiliation it would be to confess to his old friend! And Esther! What would his little girl think of him? A breach of promise case was an awful disgrace, but it couldn't be so bad as marrying.

“What did you tell Esther?” he asked in a meek voice.

“I told her what you told me to tell her. You told me to let her know about her being a foundling, and how she was put on your doorstep wrapped in an old serge jacket with no mark of identification — nothing but a package of paper patterns and some bits of cotton cloth. Of course, I did not relish breaking the news to her, but you had asked me to do it. She was furious about the whole thing and would not speak to me.”

Andrew Wallace sank down in his chair and closed his eyes. It had come at last! His child knew all the miserable, sordid truth, and it had been his fault. His little mascot! What must she think of him? How hurt she must have been — to learn this terrible thing from a person she had never liked — a stranger, indeed! Maybe, even now, she had gone off and jumped in the river! Blood will tell. Her mother before her had done it — why not Esther? Mrs. Richards must be telling the truth. He must have told her all about Esther. How else could she have had it so straight — serge jacket, paper patterns and all.

He covered his face with his hands.

“Oh, my dear, don't take it so hard,” and now Mrs. Richards was the comforter. She put her

arm around him and drew his head down on her bosom. With a sharp effort he threw her off, and just then Mammy came hobbling into the room.

"Doc Andy, I's got a word ter say ter you."

"Your master is otherwise engaged," said Mrs. Richards, her face flaming with anger and the white dents showing very plainly.

"Mammy, Mammy, where is Esther? Is she safe?"

"Yes, Doc Andy, she air safe, but it ain't thanks ter you nor yo' household. Ain't I raised you, Doc Andy? Ain't I raised yo' lil gal, an' done it the bes' I kin?"

"Yes, Mammy!"

"Well, then, I air gonter deman' that you listen ter me an' you make yo' housekeeper listen ter me. I ain't got nothin' in life but knowin' my white folks is happy an' I see mis'ry ahead fer them if I can't speak out. You make Mrs. Richards stay, too, Doc Andy."

Mrs. Richards was preparing to leave. She started towards the door, but Dr. Wallace caught her firmly by the arm, and she was compelled to stop and listen to what Mammy had to say.

The old woman had straightened up, and her eyes were flashing as she told all she knew about



Mrs. Stanley, alias Mrs. Richards. She spoke of the similarity in voice, mentioned her doubts about her identity, and then told how certainty had come to her when she was lying on the floor after her accident.

“Now, is you or ain’t you Mrs. Stanley?” Mammy asked, pointing a finger of accusation at the infuriated woman.

“I am Mrs. Stanley, Dr. Wallace,” she said ignoring Mammy. “But I cannot see that I have committed any crime in concealing my name, since Stanley certainly had done nothing to make that name honorable. As a widow, I determined to let the past vanish, and so I took my maiden name of Richards. I will go, now,” she remarked with dignity. “I do not intend to stand here and have this vile negress insult me further.”

“No, you won’t go! Hol’ on ter her, Doc Andy. I air jes’ coming to the meat in the nut. You ain’t no widow woman any mo’ than Doc Andy is a widow man. He ain’t neber been married, an’ Mr. Stanley ain’t any deader than I is, an’ Gawd be praised, they is enough life lef’ in me ter see my white folks through.”

“Stanley not dead! You are mad!” cried Mrs. Richards.

“Yes, I am mad, mad as a wet hin, an’ what’s



mo', my bite air gonter do some damage befo' I gits thu. Whar wa' you at a leetle befo' nine this mawnin'? Answer me that. Well, you needn't answer if you thinks a nigger ain't wuth answerin'. I knows! You wa' in this hyar very room a-talkin ter Mr. Stanley, an' he tol' you all about my baby chil', an' how she wa' lef' on the do'step, an' the patterns an' all, an' you tol' him that you an' Doc Andy wa' done goin' to be married an' that he would hab a sof' berth if he'd jes' keep hisse'f dark. An' he up'n said he wa' broke, an' you jes' han' him over ol' 'Ria Johnson's penshum. Now, ain't I a-tellin' the truf?"

"Let me go! How can you stand here and let me be so insulted?" Mrs. Richards tried to get away, but the doctor held her firmly.

"Go on, Mammy!"

"Then you goes up into Esther's room an' you tells her that her paw is gonter marry you and that he done sint you up ter tell her all about it, an' then you tells her about how she comed here — an' then whin you felt maybe the po' lamb still had a lil piece er heart lef' that wa'n't all broke inter bits, you tells her that she will do wrong ter marry Dr. Jim cause of her being onlegitermat an' then you lef' her. Now, ain't it the truf?"

“Mammy, how do you know all this?” asked the doctor, hoping she had some proof of it. He could not know how Mammy could have amassed such an amazing aggregation of facts.

“I seed Mr. Stanley wif my own eyes — what is good as new — a-comin out er this very house a-countin’ a bunch er new bills, an’ wif his usual untidy ways he th’owed this very ’velope on the pavement.” She produced the torn envelope addressed in the doctor’s handwriting.

“Now, if you don’t believe me, you kin jes’ phome Mr. Peter. Me’n him is a been wuckin’ up this case tergether. What I don’t know, he knows — but here he am ter speak fer hisse’f.”

In walked Peter. The situation was intelligible at a glance.

“Now, befo’ I stops, I want ter say something mo’. You done took my penshum an’ you kin keep it, but you is got ter state in the presence er these hyar witnesses that you put the brandy bottle on the sideboard yo’self that there time I wint blin’, an’ you done it fer meanness an’ cause you were scairt I’d say you wa’ Mrs. Stanley. Ain’t that the truf? You’d better answer or I’ll git the law on you ’bout my penshum.”

Mrs. Richards bowed her head. The doctor released her and she hurried from the room.

“Dear old Mammy! You raised a fool when

you raised me. Peter, why don't you tell me what an ass I am?" Dr. Wallace grasped his friend by the hand.

The door opened and Jim Dudley came hurriedly in.

"Where is Esther? I have tried to see her and get her on the phone. What is the mystery? Mammy, you are the only sane person I know. Tell me where Esther is!"

"She air at my cabin. I jes' stepped out a minute ter buy some 'visions fer her lunch."

"Well, come on! I'll take you in my car, and please may I have some lunch, too?"

"Sho if you kin wait 'till I knock it up."

Together the young aristocrat and the old colored mammy left the house. From an upstairs window Mrs. Richards peeped out and saw them.

"Lou Stanley, you are beaten — and beaten by a nigger at that," she said bitterly. Then she dragged out her trunk from the closet and began to pack it.

## Chapter 33

### MAMMY'S JUSTIFICATION

With silent steps Mammy and Dr. Jim entered the little white house where the sleeping girl lay. All traces of weeping had departed from her pretty face, leaving only faint violet circles under the closed lashes. Jim felt like kneeling, but it really seemed more sensible to sit, so he drew up a chair where he could gaze upon the girl, and there he patiently waited for her eyes to open.

The closed eyes finally did open a moment and gazed at the young man, but then they closed again as though the girl could not make up her mind to come back to reality. Reality meant misery and sadness, but her dreams had been sweet, and so she had determined to dream on. On immaculate creases, Jim dropped down and kissed her hand.

“Why — Jim! Are you here?”

“Esther, you didn't give me my answer last night. I have been hunting you all day. What is it, sweet?”

“Oh — Jim — I have found out something

that makes me know that we — that I — I don't love you."

"You don't love me! Esther, dearest, please tell me what is the matter. Didn't you love me last night? I'd believe your eyes as soon as I would your lips, and your eyes seemed to tell me the truth last night. What has happened?"

"I'd rather you ask Mammy. She knows."

"I know she knows something, but she wouldn't tell me a thing. I have tried to make her talk, but she just shakes her head and says nothing."

And so Esther told him the pitiful little tale. She would not let him touch her while she told it. "And so you see," she said in conclusion, "it will never do. You might ruin all your prospects — your whole life — in marrying a girl like me, with no name — no more name than Cora's little Esther."

"Well, of all the tommyrot! No name! Why, your name is Esther Wallace now, and it is going to be Esther Dudley as soon as we can manage it! What difference does it make to me how you got here just so you are here?"

"That is what Mammy said."

"Dear old Mammy! What a trump she is!" and again he clasped the willing hands of the unresisting girl.



"But, Jim, if you had known this about me, wouldn't you have been less inclined to give me your — your heart?"

"Why, honey, I have known it for years! Your father told me all about it before I sent that letter to you — the one I wrote the night after you went off to boarding-school. I reckon you have forgotten all about that letter —"

"No, I haven't. I have it yet."

"Ever since I wrote that letter I have considered myself engaged, only the engagement has been rather one-sided. Couldn't you make it two-sided, now, sweetheart?"

Esther could and she would. All the pent-up feelings of the girl gave way. She threw herself on her lover's shoulder and sobbed.

While Esther was making it two-sided, Mammy was waving her wand to some purpose in her cheerful little kitchen.

"When they's aigs in the house, an' bakin in the house, an' meal in the bar'l, an' a drap er milk fer mixin', comp'ny kin come all they's a min' ter. Ol' 'Ria Johnson kin stir herse'f an' knock up a snack quicker'n a wink. I's seen Dr. Jim eat fifteen corn-cakes at a sittin', an' praise Gawd, they's still some 'lasses in the pitcher — nice black, nigger 'lasses wif some tas' to it 'sides sweetness."

“ You all time thinkin’ ’bout victuals! ” Here Mammy’s second voice took up the thread of reflection. “ Don’t you reckon Dr. Jim an’ Miss Esther is got somethin’ ter do ’sides eat corn batty cakes? ’Lasses ain’t gonter be no treat to they alls after all the sweet talk an — an — maybe kisses.” The old woman wiped her eyes.

“ You cyarn’t pick no quar’l wif me, nigger! ” the original voice answered. “ I’s too happy fer quar’lin’. Things is a tu’nin’ out my way. I knows I’s black; I knows I ain’t eddicated; I knows I wa’ bawn in slabery an’ wa’ a woman growed befo’ I got my freedom. I knows all that. But I knows I done tuck my white folks’ fairs in my han’s an’ I done wuck ’em out ter do my way. It wa’ all fer my baby. I done lied one big lie an’ I stuck to it — an’ now, praise Gawd, I won’t hab ter lie no mo’.”

“ If’n you ain’t too proudified ter eat in the kitchen, yo’ snack air ready,” announced Mammy, entering the front room. “ Well, Gawd in Heaben, what kinder carryin’s on is this? ”

“ Look, Jim! ” cried Esther, not a whit embarrassed by Mammy. “ Only look! Mammy is a fairy godmother. Can’t you see her beautiful face with a glow all around it, and her long,

pale-blue robes with stars and moons and suns all over it? Those aren't apron strings in the back. Those are beautiful wings."

"Mebbe so! Mebbe so!" laughed the old woman, delightedly. "But now I'm a-tellin you that yo' victuals air a-gittin chilled."

Hand in hand they went to the tiny kitchen.

While they ate, Mammy fried cakes and told them of the happenings of the morning. Dr. Dudley was astonished at the perfidy of the woman whom he had liked and trusted.

"How could she have fooled me so?"

"Lawd love us, Dr. Jim, you ain't got no since 'bout females. You think they is all lubly ladies. So they is — all lubly ter you. Me'n Miss Esther, we knowed from the fust beginning jes' what kind er she-debble she wa', but we bided our time, we bided our time."

"Now, I don't want ter hurry you, honey baby, but yo' paw air pow'ful unhappy 'bout you — an' I reckon he am neglectin' the sick an' sufferin' while he grunts an' groans. An' I cyarn't see that Dr. Dudley air ministered none ter the ailin' this day. 'Cose, gittin' engaged air kinder upsettin', but it's time ter be a-movin 'long."

"But, Mammy, I can't go home until Mrs. Richards is out of the way. I simply can't."

“Why, honey baby, that there woman air took herse’f off lon’ ’fo this. She knowed she wa’ whoopt, an’ she wa’n’t gonter stay an’ git nothin mo’. I reckon she done jined that there Stanley an’ they is already a-puttin they evil haids ter-gether ter think up mo’ ways ter do folks.”

“And Lucile? Poor Lucile! What will become of her?”

“Yo’ paw will see to it that she don’t suffer none. You might go name it to him.”

“I won’t go until you promise me one thing, Mammy,” said the young man as he shook her gnarled old hand. “When Esther and I are married, you will have to come and live with us and keep house for us.”

“We’ll see! We’ll see!” said the delighted old woman. “Anyway, I won’t be fer from my white folks wherever I is.”

THE END





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